PLATO'S PRAGMATISM

RETHINKING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ETHICS AND EPISTEMOLOGY

Nicholas R. Baima and Tyler Paytas

Plato's Pragmatism

Plato's Pragmatism offers the first comprehensive defense of a pragmatist reading of Plato. According to Plato, the ultimate rational goal is not to accumulate knowledge and avoid falsehood but rather to live an excellent human life.

The book contends that a pragmatic outlook is present throughout the Platonic corpus. The authors argue that the successful pursuit of a good life requires cultivating certain ethical commitments, and that maintaining these commitments often requires violating epistemic norms. In the course of defending the pragmatist interpretation, the authors present a forceful Platonic argument for the conclusion that the value of truth has its limits, and that what matters most are one's ethical commitments and the courage to live up to them. Their interpretation has far-reaching consequences in that it reshapes how we understand the relationship between Plato's ethics and epistemology.

Plato's Pragmatism will appeal to scholars and advanced students of Plato and ancient philosophy. It will also be of interest to those working on current controversies in ethics and epistemology.

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And so, Glaucon, his story was saved and not lost; and it would save us, too, if we were persuaded by it, since we would safely cross the River of Forgetfulness with our souls undefiled. But if we are persuaded by me, we'll believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and every good, and always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with wisdom every way we can, so that we'll be friends to ourselves and to the gods, both while we remain here on Earth and when we receive the rewards of justice, and go around like victors in the games collecting prizes; and so both in this life and on the thousand-year journey we have described, we shall fare well.

Republic 10.621b8–d3

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Translations and Abbreviations

Translations of Plato are slightly modified from those found in Cooper and Hutchinson (1997). However, with respect to the *Laws*, we have also made use of the translations by Griffith (2016) and Meyer (2015). The Greek follows the most recently published *Oxford Classical Text*. References to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* follow Rowe (2002). For Aristotle's other works, we refer to the translations in Barnes (1984). Abbreviations of ancient sources follow those found in the fourth edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, https://oxfordre.com/classics/page/abbreviation-list/; abbreviations of non-ancient historical sources are found in the historical section of the reference page.

Regarding the Greek language, we will follow this convention: we will transliterate key individual Greek words but will provide the Greek for longer strings of words; we will cite specific line numbers where a particular word or string of words is pertinent (e.g. 2.382a1) and will cite overall passage numbers to indicate that the passage as a whole is generally relevant (e.g. 2.383a).

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Prelude

> But you will have understood what I am aiming at, namely, that our faith in science is still based on a *metaphysical faith*—that even we knowers of today, we godless anti-metaphysicians, still take *our* fire from the flame lit by a faith thousands of years old, that faith of the Christians, which was also Plato's faith, that God is truth, that truth is *divine*. But what if precisely this becomes more and more unbelievable, when nothing any longer turns out to be divine except for error, blindness, and lies—and what if God should prove to be our most enduring lie?
>
> (Nietzsche, GS 5.344; GM 3.24)

> When the health of our soul and our self-respect are at stake, even irrational measures are justified.
>
> (Epictetus, *Frag*. 10a)

1 The Alethic Interpretation

In the late 19th century, William James started a debate with W. K. Clifford over the norms of belief-formation and inquiry. James was responding to Clifford's essay, "The Ethics of Belief," which argues that "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (EB 77). Clifford asks us to imagine a shipowner about to send to sea an old and weathered ship in need of serious repairs. Seeing the ship in this condition, the shipowner doubts the seaworthiness of the vessel, but he sets these worries aside and convinces himself that the ship can endure a few more trips. He reasons to himself that "she had gone safely through so many voyages and weathered so many storms that it was idle to suppose she would not come safely home from this trip also" (EB 70). So he "put[s] his trust in Providence" and acquires "a sincere and comfortable conviction that his vessel was thoroughly safe and seaworthy" as he watches the ship depart "with a light heart" (EB 70). The shipowner, nevertheless, should have trusted the evidence—for the vessel sank mid-ocean.

The moral of the story is that we should believe on the basis of evidence rather than hope, wish, or faith; and this remains true even if our wishful thinking turns out true or has positive consequences:

> When an action is once done, it is right or wrong for ever; no accidental failure of its good or evil fruits can possibly alter that. The man [i.e. the shipowner] would not have been innocent, he would only have been not found out. The question of right or wrong has to do with the origin of his belief, not the matter of it; not whether it turned out to be true or false, but whether he had a right to believe on such evidence as was before him.
>
> (EB 71)

Clifford's larger point is that, as a matter of social obligation, we ought always to form reasonable beliefs, for "no one man's belief is in any case a private matter which concerns himself alone" (EB, 73). Even seemingly innocuous beliefs need to be subjected to rigorous inspection:

> No real belief, however trifling and fragmentary it may seem, is ever truly insignificant; it prepares us to receive more of its like, confirms those which resembled it before, and weakens others; and so gradually it lays a stealthy train in our inmost thoughts, which may some day explode into overt action, and leave its stamp upon our character for ever.
>
> (EB 73)

James wasn't buying it. In his essay, "The Will to Believe," James argues that sometimes the demands of life require that we believe without proper evidence; indeed, science and inquiry itself demand faith before evidence. He puts the point thus:

> Our faith is faith in some one else's faith, and in the greatest matters this is most the case. Our belief in truth itself, for instance, that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other,—what is it but a passionate affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs up? We want to have truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussion must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives.
>
> (WTB 9–10)

James' point is that not only should the epistemic sometimes take a back seat to the practical, but that the epistemic depends on the practical as well. Our drive for knowledge is, after all, a volition, and it requires having faith in our epistemic community and processes as well as the hope

that we will succeed. Given that James is perhaps the most well-known pragmatist, this response should come as no surprise.[1]

The debate between Clifford and James brings to the forefront questions concerning the relationship between practical and epistemic normativity. Demarcating between the epistemic and the practical can be tricky—neither James nor Clifford were entirely successful in this regard. Although some amount of vagueness is unavoidable, for the purposes of this book, we will distinguish between these two types of normativity on the basis of what we take to be their general ends. Practical normativity aims at well-being (one's own or others') and moral goodness or rightness. Epistemic normativity aims at truth (or at least avoidance of falsehood) and knowledge. One might also try to distinguish between the two by focusing on the things to which they apply. Whereas practical normativity applies to actions, epistemic normativity applies to beliefs. While this is a reasonable way of proceeding, it is not without ambiguities. For instance, some norms apply to actions but are directed towards epistemic ends; consider: "Always take precautions to avoid being influenced by your biases while gathering evidence." This norm seems practical insofar as it guides our actions. But since the norm is directed towards the goal of true belief, we will classify it as an epistemic norm.

Understood in this way, "alethists," like Clifford, maintain that we should never violate epistemic norms, whereas "pragmatists," like James, maintain that sometimes we should.[2] Plato is typically contrasted with pragmatists and viewed as a great champion of the alethically inclined. As Simon Blackburn puts it in his introductory book on truth, "The sides in this conflict have various names: absolutists versus relativists, traditionalists versus postmodernists, realists versus idealists, objectivists versus subjectivists, rationalists versus social constructivists, Platonists versus pragmatists" (2005, xiii). Let us call the anti-pragmatist reading of Plato the "Alethic Interpretation." As the first epigraph illustrates, Nietzsche accuses philosophers of fetishizing truth and undervaluing falsehood, and he sees Plato as an originator of this problem. To be clear, Nietzsche isn't accusing Plato of thinking that everyone should always seek truth and avoid falsehood. After all, Nietzsche congratulates Plato for putting forth "a real lie, a genuine, resolute, 'honest' lie" in the *Republic* (GM 3.19). Instead, Nietzsche's charge is that Plato thinks that philosophers themselves aim only at truth and never accept falsehood, and that in doing this, they neglect the value of uncertainty, ignorance, and falsehood (BGE 1.1).

Nietzsche's view of Plato is not eccentric; his interpretation was prevalent in antiquity as well. It was, for instance, essential to the Academy's turn towards skepticism. Arcesilaus extracted from Plato's dialogues the lesson of suspending judgment in order to avoid false belief. Moreover, many scholars today agree that the essence of Platonic philosophy is pursuit of the true and avoidance of the false. Katja Vogt, for instance,

argues that it is a Socratic intuition "to avoid the acceptance of falsehoods, and that it is preferable to make no truth claims as opposed to false ones" (2012, 24).

The Alethic Interpretation is not limited to scholars with skeptical leanings. Pragmatic readings are unpopular because they flout orthodoxy about the unity of practical and theoretical reason in Plato. As Julia Annas puts it in her classic introduction to the *Republic*:

> [Plato] would reject any distinction of practical and theoretical reasoning, and hence of the "practical" and "contemplative" conceptions of the philosopher; he would say that there was only one conception, that of the person in whom reason is supreme both in contemplating the Forms and in making good practical decisions.
>
> (1981, 265)

More recently, C. M. M. Olfert writes in reference to Plato's view of reason:

> When we engage in practical reasoning, we do not pursue acting well, or truth and knowledge, as independent aims or values. Instead, when we engage in practical reasoning (perhaps especially when we do so knowledgeably and well), the aim or the value of figuring out what to do is inseparable from the aim or the value of grasping the truth. What is more, from the perspective of practical reasoning, our practical and epistemic aims and values are equally fundamental and important—neither is pursued for the sake of the other. So when we reason about what to do, truth and knowledge on the one hand, and action and acting well on the other, are *inseparable* and *equally fundamental* values or aims. Practical reasoning is irreducibly and equally both rational and practical.
>
> (2017, 2)

It is widely held that in explicitly distinguishing between theoretical and practical reasoning, Aristotle departs from Plato. In her introduction to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Sarah Broadie explains:

> Aristotle seems to have been the first to teach that abstract theoretical understanding does not confer practical wisdom, is not a precondition of that sort of wisdom, and is to be prized entirely for its own sake; and the first to see clearly that these are two quite different kinds of excellence. Whereas Plato used the terms "*phronēsis*" and "*sophia*" without distinction, Aristotle makes them names of different qualities, and brings out the differences to the point of being able to say that wisdom is "antithetical to [theoretical] intelligence."
>
> (Aristotle 2002, 7; see also *Nic. Eth.* 6.8.1142a25)

An implicit appeal to this dogma is found in Sean Kelsey's (2013) response to Raphael Woolf's (2009) challenge to simplistic forms of alethism. With the useful falsehoods of the Kallipolis in mind, Woolf argues that not all truths are equally valuable in the *Republic*—in fact, non-philosophical truths have no inherent value. Rather than directly challenging the textual evidence Woolf references, Kelsey defends Plato's love of truth generally by appealing to the conceptual connection between truth, wisdom, the other virtues, and goodness: wisdom necessarily involves valuing truth completely, not merely some individual truths. Given wisdom's connection to the other virtues and goodness, all truths are valuable in themselves (see also L. Pangle 2014).

If Plato thinks that theoretical and practical reason are unified such that there cannot be a genuine conflict between epistemic and practical norms, then an alethic/anti-pragmatist reading must be correct. If living well never requires setting aside one's commitment to truth and truthfulness, then obviously there would be no reason for Plato to advocate a form of pragmatism; the Platonic recipe for virtue and flourishing would involve the unwavering adherence to sound epistemic practices.

It isn't difficult to see why so many students of Plato, both past and present, accept some version of the Alethic Interpretation. After all, in Plato's so-called early dialogues, Socrates notoriously disavows knowledge of important things and admonishes those who falsely claim to possess it. For instance, in the *Apology*, Socrates tests the Oracle of Delphi's claim that no one is wiser than he is by seeking out and challenging those who profess to have wisdom (20e–23c). Upon doing this, Socrates discovers that he is wiser than those who think they are wise because only he is cognizant of his ignorance—others claim knowledge without really knowing and thus are ignorant of their ignorance. Socrates identifies this practice of self-examination with philosophy, a divine exercise that he will pursue to his death (28b–32e). From this text, it is easy enough to see why one would think that Plato considers philosophy a skeptical practice that is fundamentally about avoiding falsehood and expelling false beliefs from others.

Consider also that in the *Gorgias* Socrates is careful to distinguish philosophy from mere rhetorical persuasion. Philosophy is concerned with truth and goodness, while rhetorical persuasion is indifferent to the truth, being merely concerned with flattery and pleasure. For example, when Polus attempts to refute Socrates through rhetoric, Socrates replies, "You don't compel me; instead you produce many false witnesses against me and try to banish me from my property, the truth" (472b3–6). Socrates' identification of truth as his property is consistent with his assertion in the *Euthyphro* that he "prefer[s] nothing, unless it is true" (14e9).

Plato's commitment to truth and aversion to falsehood isn't idiosyncratic to his so-called early dialogues but extends to the rest of the corpus as well. The philosophers of the *Republic*, for instance, are committed to

truth in the same way that Socrates is in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*. In the *Republic*, Socrates says that philosophers "must be without falsehood—they must refuse to accept what is false, hate it, and have a love for the truth" (6.485c3–4). Plato's love of truth continues into what many scholars consider his last work, the *Laws*. Through the mouth of the unnamed Athenian, Plato says that "truth heads the list of all things good, for gods and humans alike" (730c1–2).

Additionally, throughout the corpus, Plato expresses a steadfast pledge to sound epistemic practices. Notably, Socrates asserts that they must follow the argument wherever it blows (*Resp*. 3.394d8–9) and always accept the reasoning that seems best (*Cr*. 46b). This commitment is clearly a feature of Plato's love of truth; for it is through rational and impartial inquiry, not emotional and partial reasoning, that we reliably reach truth and make epistemic progress.

From all of this, we see that the Alethic Interpretation is not without cause. Given the historical precedent for this interpretation, as well as the textual evidence just cited, it is unsurprising that Plato's unwavering commitment to truth seems to operate as a background assumption for many philosophers and classicists. And yet, despite all of this, we believe that the Alethic Interpretation is mistaken—Plato is much closer to James than to Clifford. Our aim in this book is to propose and defend an interpretation of Plato according to which the ultimate human goal is not truth and knowledge but rather living well and maintaining psychological harmony—we call this view "Plato's Pragmatism." While this isn't identical with versions of pragmatism advanced by thinkers such as Peirce, James, and Dewey, we use this name in order to convey both that life involves a clash of normative commitments and that the practical has priority over the epistemic. As emphasized by Epictetus (one of Socrates' greatest admirers) in the second epigraph, the pursuit of virtue can justify the occasional violation of epistemic norms.

In order to make progress on this issue, we must specify the conventional interpretation that we seek to challenge. We take the following three claims to compose the essence of the Alethic Interpretation:

1. Absolutist Evaluative Claim: Plato believes that truth is always preferable to falsehood.
2. Epistemic Caution Claim: Plato believes that we ought never to form beliefs in the absence of strong evidence.
3. Philosopher Claim: Plato believes that a philosopher could never benefit from false belief or epistemic risk.

Each of these claims can be stated in many different ways; indeed, different scholars are implicitly and explicitly committed to different formulations of each. Rather than critically examining all of the myriad alethic readings, we will confront the general thrust of these three central claims.

John Doris once described the perils of such an approach as being like drawing a face that looks like many faces but doesn't look like any particular face. This runs the risk of upsetting those who possess the particular faces we are targeting (i.e. those who are sympathetic to the Alethic Interpretation). Our response to this worry follows that of Doris (2015, 17): we wager that the face we depict is easily recognizable. That said, even if no one had ever suggested an Alethic Interpretation, our project would hopefully still prove useful in its organization and integration of passages that endorse both falsehood and risky belief-formation, as well as its construction of a Platonic ethics of belief.

The core of our pragmatic interpretation of Plato consists in grounds for rejecting each of the three aforementioned claims. Against the Absolutist Evaluative Claim, we maintain that for Plato there are certain commitments—to care for the health of one's soul, to promote justice within one's city—that a person needs in order to live well. A successful life requires that these commitments be entrenched and unwavering, and falsehoods are sometimes necessary for initiating and sustaining them—especially for those people and soul-parts that lack philosophical understanding. Against the Epistemic Caution Claim, we hold that there are some questions that outstrip one's ability to answer them with adequate epistemic justification—questions, for instance, that concern the nature of the soul, the gods, death, and even philosophy itself. Sometimes the demands of living well require one to form beliefs about these questions despite the high risk of error. Finally, the fact that all humans, including philosophers, can benefit from falsehoods in these ways, tells against the Philosopher Claim.

2 Summary

The book comprises three parts, with each part focused primarily on one of the above claims. Part I takes on the Absolutist Evaluative Claim by analyzing the value of truth and falsehood. Chapter 1 examines the useful falsehoods of the *Republic* in light of a puzzling passage in Book 2 where Socrates distinguishes between genuine falsehoods and falsehoods in words. Genuine falsehoods are always bad, but falsehoods in words are sometimes beneficial (2.382a–d). We argue that genuine falsehoods are a restricted class of false beliefs about ethics: they are false beliefs about how one ought to live and what one ought to pursue. We refer to these beliefs as "ethical commitments." False ethical commitments are always pernicious because they create and sustain psychological disharmony. Unlike genuine falsehoods, falsehoods in words can be about anything. These falsehoods are preferable when they help initiate and sustain true ethical commitments (as in the case of the noble lie, 3.414d–415c). In Chapter 2, we corroborate our interpretation of useful falsehoods by arguing that the same account is found in the *Laws*. This is most

evident in the Athenian Stranger's use of preludes (4.711c, 4.718b–d, and 4.722b) and the myth-based account of religion offered to citizens. Both of these present false explanatory beliefs for the sake of cultivating true ethical commitments.

Since the concept of ethical commitment is central to our pragmatic reading, it is important to get a clear understanding of what ethical commitment involves—this is the goal of Chapter 3. Our pragmatic interpretation might misleadingly suggest that Plato's ethics is primarily concerned with individual acts and their material consequences. The tendency to think of ethical and evaluative judgments along these lines underlies an influential critique of the ring of Gyges argument from *Republic* 2. Some scholars claim that Glaucon's argument cannot achieve its ostensible aim of demonstrating that nobody values justice for its own sake. This is because endorsement of Gyges' actions (i.e. using the invisibility ring to commit murder and seize power) is compatible with assigning *some* intrinsic value to justice—one might simply judge this value to be outweighed. We argue that this is not a plausible understanding of the intrinsic valuing of ethical ideals such as justice. An agent who chooses to pursue justice for its own sake is someone who has an ethical commitment to justice. Ethical commitments involve endorsement of the essential norms of the object in question (e.g. justice), and such endorsement must be relatively stable in order for pursuit of the object to be rational. This discussion reveals that Platonic ethical commitment is more complex than alternative notions of valuing that are prevalent within contemporary ethical theory.

After explaining what kinds of false beliefs can be beneficial in Part I, Part II examines the norms of belief. The primary aim of this part is to demonstrate that Plato does not accept the Epistemic Caution Claim, for he holds that sometimes it is appropriate to accept a proposition in the absence of strong evidence. In Chapter 4, we examine the behavior of Plato's favorite philosopher, Socrates, in the *Phaedo*. Socrates apparently believes that he is justified in violating epistemic norms but that his friends should continue to search for the truth (90e–91c). We argue that it is primarily in virtue of Socrates' philosophical acumen and position of influence that he is permitted to risk false belief, even though his friends are not. Socrates' willingness to adopt an unphilosophical approach to his beliefs about death tells against the Epistemic Caution Claim (as well as the Philosopher Claim).

The aim of Chapter 5 is to bolster our case against the Epistemic Caution Claim by showing that Plato's endorsement of epistemic risk extends across a broader range of contexts. This chapter focusses on the *Meno* and its well-known paradox of inquiry—that one needs ignorance to be motivated to inquire, and yet one cannot hope to succeed in inquiry when starting from a place of ignorance. We argue that Socrates' solution to this problem involves an appeal to a type of faith that is essential

for virtue. While Meno is right about the lack of objective reasons for believing that our inquiries will bear fruit, the choice to carry on with inquiry makes us braver and more active. Hence, we are justified in having faith regarding this matter on pragmatic grounds, and thus we have an example of a justified epistemic risk that arises for anyone who is in a position to engage in inquiry.

Chapter 6 compares the way that Socrates engages in inquiry with others in the *Euthydemus* and the *Protagoras*. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates is eager to discuss the nature of virtue with the sophist brothers, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, and he encourages others to do so as well. Conversely, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates is cautious and warns Hippocrates about the dangers of inquiry. We argue that Socrates is more cautious when dealing with Protagoras because there is greater risk of developing false beliefs when engaging in inquiry with interlocutors who are seemingly truthful than when one's interlocutors are clearly ridiculous like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. This chapter further demonstrates the complexity of Plato's thoughts on inquiry. We cannot accept a simple prescription such as "always avoid the risk of falsehood" because how we should engage in discussion depends on who we are talking to, what we are talking about, and the state of our own character.

Part III addresses the questions of how false beliefs can be utilized and to whom they are beneficial. According to the Philosopher Claim, false beliefs are useful only for non-philosophers, if at all. In Chapter 7, we argue that a proper understanding of Plato's moral psychology suggests that the non-reasoning part of philosophers' souls requires false beliefs in order to be virtuous, in much the same way that non-philosophers require false beliefs. The non-reasoning part of philosophers' souls, like a non-philosopher, is too unsophisticated to grasp the complete truth; hence, it requires falsehood in order to be properly motivated.

Having established that philosophers' epistemic superiority does not preclude their benefitting from falsehoods, Chapter 8 examines whether the same is true of the gods. Socrates explicitly denies that the gods ever deceive (2.382a–383a), but his explanation is rather curious. A common philosophical explanation for why God doesn't lie is that deception is immoral and thereby incompatible with divine attributes such as moral perfection. Yet, instead of highlighting the inherent badness of lying, Socrates emphasizes the ostensible fact that the gods never have any reason to lie. This is puzzling since the gods love justice, and they would presumably have reason to utilize deception to facilitate justice in human beings just as the philosopher-rulers do. Our solution to this puzzle centers on the distinction between gods and humans with respect to self-sufficiency. Because humans are not self-sufficient, we must live in societies and interact with individuals who stand towards us as both friends and enemies. It is these relations that sometimes necessitate beneficial lies and override their inherent

badness. Since the gods are self-sufficient, they have no need for such relations and the lies that they necessitate.

With our evidence against the Alethic Interpretation amassed, we conclude by synthesizing the main tenets of Plato's Pragmatism and addressing two potential objections to our reading: that it can't account for passages which seemingly privilege truth and rationality, and that it overlooks Plato's emphasis on metaphysics. After responding to these objections, we end by highlighting the numerous ways in which the views we've attributed to Plato are relevant for contemporary problems that are of philosophical, political, and personal interest.

3 Methodology

The goal of this book is both interpretive and philosophical. We aim to offer a lively interpretation of Plato that respects textual evidence while raising deep questions about the connection between ethics and epistemology—questions which will pique the interests of contemporary philosophers. We avoid trenchant and painstaking interpretive methodologies because we think a more permissive and ecumenical approach allows for more fruitful discussion. Nevertheless, five key interpretive and methodological principles guide our work.

First, we believe that each of the Platonic dialogues has its own specific topic and character that makes it deserving of individual treatment. Hence, most chapters center on a particular dialogue. As such, we are not ourselves invested in a chronological or developmental narrative. But this is not to deny that Plato had relatively stable views on key issues (such as the relation between practical and epistemic norms). Cross-dialogue comparisons of different texts are often useful for illuminating these views, and so we gladly compare and extrapolate from different texts when doing so seems warranted. When we employ this strategy, we endeavor to provide textual, literary, and philosophical justification for the comparison.

Second, most of the chapters in this book are puzzle-driven; we begin by locating a tension in the text between various passages and Platonic commitments. We proceed in this way not to proliferate puzzles but because, as Aristotle recognized, it is an effective way to get to the heart of a philosophical issue (see Irwin 1988, Chap. 2). Our goal is to either reconcile these puzzles on behalf of Plato or show why he might not want them resolved. As interpreters, we adhere to a principle of charity: we proceed under the assumption that Plato advances plausible, well-developed, and interesting views, even if we are not always fully convinced.

Third, we are happy to engage with multiple aspects of Plato's dialogues and to pull in outside resources when this helps advance the discussion. As such, we will occasionally call attention to how literary features of the dialogues inform what is at stake philosophically. In addition, we

will draw on other figures from the history of philosophy where they are relevant, including Aristotle, Epictetus, Kant, Nietzsche, Sidgwick, and James.

Fourth, because our interest is primarily in the ethics of belief, and because we are interested in bringing Plato into conversation with philosophers across a vast time span, we will be somewhat liberal with our application of concepts. For instance, we will sometimes utilize contemporary philosophical terminology in order to illuminate and connect various ideas in the texts, usually with corresponding clarificatory endnotes. While our defense of the pragmatist interpretation includes discussion of key elements of Platonic epistemology and metaphysics, we do not have adequate space for a comprehensive examination of these subareas of Plato's philosophy. That being said, we believe our account is compatible with a range of interpretations of Plato's epistemology and metaphysics.

Fifth, we assume that Socrates (or in the case of the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger) has positive commitments, which Plato is at least sympathetic to. We do not make any claims about the historical Socrates, and as far as we know, the Athenian Stranger is simply a stranger.

We have of course benefitted greatly from works with very different methodological approaches to the dialogues, and we do not claim that ours is superior to others; every approach has its benefits and drawbacks. Our hope is that even those with different predilections will find this book to be of interest in its own right, as well as a potential resource for new developments in Plato studies and philosophy in general.

Notes

1 We are following the standard narrative concerning the debate between James and Clifford. For more nuanced accounts, Aikin (2014); Aikin and Talisse (2017, Chap. 4); Hollinger (1997); and Zamulinski (2002; 2004); see also Haack (2001); Feldman (2006); Wood (2002, Chaps. 1–2). Aikin (2014) and Aikin and Talisse (2017, Chap. 4). Aikin (2014) and Aikin and Talisse (2017, Chap. 4) point out that Clifford's principle is itself endorsed for pragmatic reasons: bad epistemic practices should be avoided because they harm society.

2 In epistemology, the position that one should only (or can only) form beliefs on the basis of evidence is called "evidentialism." We are using the term, "alethism," because the anti-pragmatist position we are interested in is broader than evidentialism. Note also that throughout this book we will use the term "evidence" broadly to include the notion of an epistemic reason—a consideration which counts in favor of taking something to be true. Construed this way, philosophical arguments count as evidence.

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Part I

Virtue, Veracity, and Noble Lies

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1 Beneficial Falsehoods in the *Republic*

The Priority of the Practical

> Strive to bring all debated conceptions to that "pragmatic test," and you will escape vain wrangling: if it can make no practical difference which of two statements be true, then they are really one statement in two verbal forms; if it can make no practical difference whether a given statement be true or false, then the statement has no real meaning. In neither case is there anything fit to quarrel about: we may save our breath, and pass to more important things.
>
> (William James, MT 51–52)

> Oh, what marvelous skill! You geometers can calculate the areas of circles, can reduce any given shape to a square, can state the distances separating stars. Nothing's outside your scope when it comes to measurement. Well, if you're such an expert, measure a man's soul; tell me how large or small that is. You can define a straight line; what use is that to you if you've no idea what straightness means in life?
>
> (Seneca, *Ep*. 88.13)

In this part of the book, we will examine the first of the three core claims that motivate the Alethic Interpretation. According to the Absolutist Evaluative Claim, Plato holds that truth is always preferable to falsehood. Perhaps the most natural place to begin investigating the plausibility of this claim is the *Republic*. After all, it is here that Plato's most famous lie (i.e. the noble lie, 3.414b–415c) and most disturbing lie (i.e. the rigged sexual lottery, 5.459c–460c) are found. While these passages seemingly tell against the Absolutist Evaluative Claim, whether they ultimately do is far from obvious. For instance, some scholars have suggested that examples such as the noble lie are allegorical or fictional and hence not actually false.[1] This issue is complicated by an obscure passage in Book 2 where Socrates distinguishes between "genuine falsehoods" and "falsehoods in words" (382a–d). Socrates claims that while genuine falsehoods are always hated by everyone, falsehoods in words are sometimes useful and thus not worthy of hatred by humans. Despite Socrates'

insistence that he isn't saying anything deep, his distinction is far from straightforward. In what sense are falsehoods in words false, and why are they not genuine falsehoods? Are the noble lie and the rigged sexual lottery not genuine falsehoods and therefore not really counterexamples to the Absolutist Evaluative Claim?

In this chapter, we analyze the relevant passages of the *Republic* with the aim of obtaining a firm grasp of the distinction between genuine falsehoods and falsehoods in words. We argue that genuine falsehoods are a restricted class of false beliefs about ethics: they are false beliefs about how one should live and what one should pursue. We refer to these beliefs as "ethical commitments." False ethical commitments are always pernicious because they create and sustain psychological disharmony. In contrast, falsehoods in words are not beliefs but rather lies, and they are beneficial when they prevent wrongdoing and help produce and sustain true ethical commitments. While the lies told by philosopher-rulers are merely falsehoods in words, they do cause citizens to have false beliefs. This is justified by the fact that these false beliefs help the citizens arrive at the correct ethical commitments. The upshot is that the *Republic* tells strongly against the Absolutist Evaluative Claim and supports a pragmatic interpretation of Plato's philosophy.

1.1 Genuine Falsehoods and Falsehood in Words

It will be helpful to begin with a brief explanation of some key Greek terms. In contemporary philosophy, "truth" usually relates to propositions. However, in ancient philosophy and ancient common usage, the Greek word for "truth," *alētheia* (adj. = *alēthēs*), can have broader applications. Plato's locution "true in word and deed" illustrates this (*Resp*. 2.382e8; cf. 2.383a4–5). Presumably, being "true in word" means that one is honest and that what one says is the case, while being "true in deed" means that one has integrity and that the way one presents oneself is accurate. Although broader applications of "truth" are not as pronounced in English philosophy, they are not alien to English linguistic practice—for example, Felipe can be a "true friend," he can apply "tried and true methods," and his "aim can be true."[2]

In opposition to *alētheia* is *pseudos* (adj. = *pseudēs*), which is ambiguous between "lie," "fiction," and "falsehood." Lies and fictions differ from falsehoods in that the former concepts relate to the speaker's state of mind and intention, while falsehoods do not. The concept of falsehood only picks out the fact that the content is false. Fictions differ from lies in that the author of fiction isn't presenting the content as true as a liar would. For example, whereas J. K. Rowling doesn't want you to actually believe that Hogwarts is a real place, the deceptive used-car salesman wants you to believe that the lemon is a diamond in the rough.[3] So,

all instances of *pseudos* involve falsehood, but not all instances involve deception or storytelling. Accordingly, the context determines whether "lie," "fiction," or "falsehood" is appropriate.

That Plato is tolerant not only of falsehood but also of lies is clear from Socrates' discussion with Cephalus in Book 1 of the *Republic*. Cephalus tells Socrates that wealth is important for good and orderly people because it allows them to be just and thus allows them to secure a good afterlife. He explains, "Not cheating or lying to someone against one's will [τὸ γὰρ μηδὲ ἄκοντά τινα ἐξαπατῆσαι ἢ ψεύσασθαι], not owing a sacrifice to some god or money to a person, and as a result departing for that other world in fear—the possession of wealth makes no small contribution to this" (1.331b1–4). Socrates responds by pointing out that justice isn't simply a matter of speaking the truth or paying whatever debts one has incurred (1.331c). He says,

> Everyone would surely agree that if a man borrows weapons from a sane [*sōphronountos*] friend, and if he [i.e. the lender] goes insane [*maneis*] and asks for them back, the friend should not return them, and wouldn't be just if he did. Nor should anyone be willing to tell the whole truth to someone in such a state [οὐδ᾽ αὖ πρὸς τὸν οὕτως ἔχοντα πάντα ἐθέλων τἀληθῆ λέγειν].
>
> (331c5–8)

It is clear that this passage isn't speaking about the permissibility of fiction, so why think it permits lying? After all, the passage only explicitly permits not telling the whole truth, which differs from lying. However, the context of this passage makes it clear that not telling the truth is equivalent to lying. This is because Cephalus' account of justice at 331b includes not lying; hence, for Socrates' objection to work he must give an account in which lying or its equivalent is just, which means we must treat not telling the whole truth as equivalent to lying.

Socrates clarifies the useful *pseudos* he has in mind in Book 2. Socrates and Adeimantus have been discussing the merits of the current educational system, which centers on the poems of Hesiod, Homer, and others. Socrates assesses how the poets depict the gods and whether this account is both true and proper for educational purposes. Socrates examines three aspects of the gods as presented by the poets. First, the poets represent the gods as causing both badness and goodness (379a–380a). Socrates finds this objectionable, arguing that because the gods are completely good, they can only cause goodness (379c; *Leg*. 10.900c–d, 12.941b). Second, the poets depict the gods as changing forms (380c–d). Socrates finds this problematic because the gods cannot alter themselves. The gods are already in the best condition; any alteration from that condition would be a change into something worse (381b–c). Third, the poets represent the gods as deceiving humans by presenting themselves as

something that they are not. Socrates asks, "But may we suppose that while the gods themselves are incapable of change, they make us believe that they appear in many shapes, deceiving and practicing magic upon us?" (381e8–10). Adeimantus responds, "Perhaps" (381e11). Surprised by Adeimantus' response, Socrates asks, "What? Would a god be willing to deceive [*pseudesthai*], either in word or deed, by presenting an illusion?" (382a1–2).

When Adeimantus expresses uncertainty (382a3), Socrates attempts to identify a kind of deception or falsehood that no god or human would accept. Socrates says, "Don't you know that all gods and humans hate at least the true falsehood [τό γε ὡς ἀληθῶς ψεῦδος], if one can put it this way?" (382a4–5).[4] The paradoxical name, "true falsehood," confuses Adeimantus (382a6). Socrates clarifies himself by explaining that "no one willingly deceives [*pseudesthai*] the most authoritative part [*tōi kuriōtatōi*] of himself about the most authoritative things [*ta kuriōtata*], but everyone most of all fears accepting it [i.e. falsehood] there" (382a7–9). Understandably, Adeimantus is still quite puzzled (382a10).

Socrates attributes this confusion to Adeimantus mistakenly, thinking that he is saying something profound or holy (*semnos*). Socrates explains that he simply means that "to deceive [*pseudesthai*] and to have deceived [*epseusthai*] one's soul about realities [*ta onta*], and to be ignorant [*amathē*], and to have [*echein*] and to hold [*kektēsthai*] the falsehood [*to pseudos*] there, is what everyone would least of all accept, and it is in that case, that they hate it most of all" (382b1–4). Surprisingly, Adeimantus says that he understands (382b5).

Now that Socrates has Adeimantus' agreement, he attempts to justify his use of the paradoxical name "true falsehood" by contrasting it with a "not altogether pure falsehood" (οὐ πάνυ ἄκρατον ψεῦδος) (382c1–2). He explains that the former occurs when one has ignorance (*agnoia*) in one's soul (382b6–8), while the latter is a "kind of imitation [*mimēma*] in words [*logois*] of the condition [*pathēmatos*] in the soul [i.e. ignorance], an image [*eidōlon*] that arises later" (382b8–c1). With this distinction in place, Socrates explains that the "real falsehood" (τὸ μὲν δὴ τῷ ὄντι ψεῦδος) is hated by both gods and humans (382c4–5), whereas the falsehood in words isn't always worthy of hatred by humans (but is by the gods). Socrates likens falsehood in words to a useful drug, which can be used for preventing the ignorant (*anoia*) or mad (*mania*) from doing bad (*kakos*) (382c7–10). Additionally, Socrates explains that when discussing ancient stories (*muthologiai*) that one is ignorant of (see 376e–378e), falsehood can be useful if it is as close to the truth as possible (382d1–4; see also Hes. *Theogy*. 27–28; Belfiore (1985); and Pratt (1993, 147n26)).

Socrates is distinguishing between a "true" (*hōs alēthōs*) or "real" (*tōi onti*) falsehood and an "imitative" falsehood that is "not altogether pure" (*ou panu akraton*).[5] Hereafter, we will simply refer to the former as a "genuine falsehood" and the latter as a "falsehood in words." Socrates'

explanation of the distinction is cryptic and thus warrants a careful analysis. It will be helpful to begin with a general summary of the distinction, after which we will explore more determinate interpretations.

Genuine falsehoods and falsehoods in words apparently differ in their location, ontology, content, and the attitude taken towards them. For instance, Socrates says that genuine falsehoods are located in the soul and in the most authoritative part of oneself. The most authoritative part either refers to the soul as a whole or the reasoning part of the soul. In contrast, the other type of falsehood is located in words. They differ in ontology to the extent that genuine falsehoods are real and involve actual ignorance, while falsehoods in words are imitative and impure. Socrates describes genuine falsehoods as being about the most authoritative things, but he doesn't specify the content of falsehoods in words. Everyone greatly fears, resents, and would least of all accept genuine falsehoods, while falsehoods in words are not always worthy of hatred for humans to the extent that they are sometimes useful. Falsehoods in words can be useful for humans by helping them avoid harm from enemies, helping so-called friends avoid doing harm out of ignorance or madness, and helping society account for ancient events.

With this outline in place, we can begin to move towards a more concrete interpretation. The fact that one falsehood takes place in the soul and the other takes place in words suggests a contrast between possessing (i.e. believing) a falsehood and telling a lie. This would explain why one type of falsehood is described as real and genuine, whereas the other type is described as impure and imitative. The words of liars are copies or imitations of beliefs and attitudes that the liar doesn't actually hold. Savvy liars must convincingly impersonate having certain beliefs and attitudes, and they must have some grasp of what aspects of their lie are true and false (see Adam 1902, *ad loc.* 382b; and Reeve 1988, 210 and 2004, xx–xxii; see also 2.377a).[6] In contrast, the possession of a falsehood (i.e. actually believing it) makes it pure or genuine. The Platonic language of reality/imitation and purity/impurity suggests a gradation of falsity rather than different fundamental kinds of falsehood (Gerson 2009, Chap. 1; Smith 2019).[7]

What exactly are falsehoods in the soul? Since they involve being in a state of ignorance, a natural answer is that they are false beliefs. However, caution is needed here for several reasons. The passage (i.e. 382a–e) suggests a connection between the pair *pseudesthai* (to deceive) and *epseusthai* (to have deceived) and the pair *echein* (to have) and *kektēsthai* (to hold). *Pseudesthai* and *echein* suggest an occurrent state of deception, while *epseusthai* and *kektēsthai* suggest a dispositional state of ignorance (see Adam 1902, *ad loc.* 382b and *Tht.* 197b–d). This enduring state of ignorance indicates something more robust than merely possessing false propositional content. Additionally, "ignorance" (*amathēs* 382b2, *agnoia* b7, *anoia* c9) can have a broader meaning than "false propositional

attitude": it can mean things like "lack of education," "stupidity," "without knowledge," or "lack of awareness" (see Vogt 2012, Introduction and Chap. 1; Smith 2012 and 2019).[8] At this point in the text, "ignorance" simply denotes a defective cognitive disposition.[9]

With all of this in mind, we would do well to follow Christopher Gill's (1993) claim that Socrates is using the terms "true" and "false" in a broader sense.[10] As Gill observes:

> [W]hile such a state consists, in part, in having false ethical beliefs, it is clear from the larger context that such "falsehood" is a property of the personality as a whole … Correspondingly, "truth" (at least, "truth in the psyche") must also be a state of the whole personality and not just a property of statements or beliefs.
>
> (1993, 45; see also Harte 2013)

So, while we will speak of genuine falsehoods as involving false beliefs, it is important to keep these qualifications in mind. Let us now move to a preliminary interpretation.

1.2 Reality and Matters of Fact

We have seen that the contrast between genuine falsehoods and falsehoods in words is between having a defective cognitive disposition and saying things that one believes to be false. A tempting interpretation is to hold that this is all the distinction amounts to—a genuine falsehood is a defective cognitive disposition involving a false belief about any matter of fact (i.e. the broad category of things that can be true or false), and a falsehood in words is simply a lie. This reading is tempting because it emphasizes the location of the ignorance (i.e. in one's soul vs. in one's words), which is the aspect of the distinction that Socrates stresses most often in the relevant passage. Further, because this reading is straightforward, it makes sense of Socrates' claim that he isn't saying anything profound or holy (*semnos*) (382b1), and it provides a non-mystical reading of *ta onta* (literally, "the things that are") as reality or facts (382b2). Additionally, this reading meshes with passages suggestive of Socrates' general love of truth and hatred of falsehood (see Kelsey 2013).

Despite these advantages, this reading is unpopular in the secondary literature.[11] Most scholars have rejected such an approach because Socrates initially restricts genuine falsehoods to the domain of "the most authoritative things" (*ta kuriōtata*) (382a8), claiming that no one is willing to tell falsehoods to himself about these things in particular. This is problematic for the "false beliefs about matters of fact" reading of genuine falsehoods because it would be rather odd to describe matters of fact in general as the most authoritative things. A proponent of this reading

might argue that Socrates is using the phrase "most authoritative" to distinguish matters of fact from subjective states such as feelings, opinions, or desires. However, the notion of telling oneself falsehoods about subjective states is a bit strained, which makes it unlikely that Socrates would bother specifying that genuine falsehoods are not about such matters. Indeed, emphasis on the distinction between facts and feelings seems more Humean than Platonic, and there are no other examples of Socrates using phrases like "most authoritative" and "most important" to refer to general matters of fact. In contrast, there are instances of Socrates using these phrases to refer to specific categories of objects (we will discuss these passages below), which suggests that the category of "most authoritative things" must be narrower than all general matters of fact. Hence, accounting for Socrates' use of "most authoritative things" in the key passage is a serious weak point for the "false beliefs about matters of fact" reading of genuine falsehoods.

A second problem for this reading is that it doesn't fit well with Socrates' claim that genuine falsehoods are hated by everyone. For instance, in Book 7, Socrates says that the individuals selected as future philosopher-rulers must be those who are disposed to hate both voluntary (*hekousion*) *pseudos* and involuntary (*akousion*) *pseudos* (535e1–e3); they must be distressed when convicted of their ignorance and not "wallow in their foolishness [*amathiāi*] like a pig in mud" (535e4–5). Presumably, the distinction between a voluntary *pseudos* and an involuntary *pseudos* is the same as the distinction between telling a lie and having a false belief (see 3.412e–413b).[12] Here, Socrates' concern is to avoid selecting people who are indifferent to (or even enjoy) being ignorant for training to become philosopher-rulers. The fact that those who are unsuited to be trained as philosophers are described as enjoying the involuntary falsehood even after being convicted of their foolishness is evidence that genuine falsehoods are not false beliefs about all matters of fact. This is because Socrates is explicit that everyone hates a genuine falsehood, and the passage in question suggests that not everyone hates having false beliefs about all matters of fact.

Ordinary folks are not the only people who seem indifferent to false beliefs—philosophers (including Socrates himself) seem unconcerned about the truth status of many claims. For instance, the philosopher who returns to the cave isn't upset that he isn't as skilled as the prisoners at identifying sensible things; he would prefer not to engage with such things at all (7.516c–517a). Similarly, Socrates often seems indifferent to the issues that the average Athenian focuses his intellect on. This is put most strongly in the other-worldly aspects of the *Theaetetus*. Socrates has been talking to Theodorus about how philosophers appear ridiculous in public—especially in the court of law (172c–173e). This is because in aristocratic and political matters the philosopher

> knows not even that he knows not; for he doesn't hold himself aloof from them in order to get a reputation, but because it is in reality only his body that lives and sleeps in the city. His mind, considering all these things petty and of no account, disdains them.
>
> (173e1–5)

Socrates continues his attack on the mundane by bringing up the case of the Presocratic philosopher, Thales, who is rumored to have fallen in a well while studying the heavens (174a):

> It really is true that the philosopher fails to see his next-door neighbor; he not only doesn't notice what he is doing; he scarcely knows whether he is a man or some other kind of creature. The question he asks is: what is a human being? What actions and passions properly belong to human nature and distinguish it from other beings? This is what he wants to know and concerns himself to investigate.
>
> (174b1–6; see also *Resp*. 6.486a, 10.604c; and *Leg*. 7.803b–804c)

Consider also how unimportant the truth of mythology is for Socrates at the beginning of the *Phaedrus*. When Phaedrus asks Socrates if he believes the legend of Boreas (The North Wind) carrying Orithuia away, Socrates replies:

> Actually, it wouldn't be out of place for me to reject it, as our intellectuals do. I could then tell a clever story … But I have no time for such things; and the reason, my friend is this. I am still unable, as the Delphic inscription orders, to know myself; and it really seems to me ridiculous to look into other things before I have understood that. That is why I don't concern myself with these things. I accept what is generally believed, and, as I was just saying, I look not into them but into my own self. Am I a beast more complicated and savage than Typhon, or am I a tamer, simpler animal with a share in a divine and gentle nature?
>
> (229c6–230a6)

Socrates could criticize this myth, he could try to rationalize it, or he could withhold judgment—he does none of these things. Instead, he takes the story at face value, sets it aside, and investigates a more pressing issue—the ethical nature of his soul.

Moreover, such indifference to trivial things and empirical matters isn't isolated to the metaphysical and mystical parts of Plato but is front and center in Callicles' condemnation of philosophy in the *Gorgias*. Callicles chastises philosophers because they are ignorant of everything that makes one "noble" in a city. Philosophers are ignorant of the customs of the city

and of how to negotiate agreements, and they are entirely inexperienced when it comes to pleasures and desires (484c–d; see also *Ap*. 17b–18a). Throughout the *Gorgias*, Socrates never denies that he is ignorant of these things; rather, he tries to show that they are of trivial importance, and that they can be downright vicious.

We don't contend that these dialogues are similar to the *Republic* in all respects, but they do illustrate a common theme about philosophers. Philosophers are not concerned about all facts. Of course, they are concerned about some empirical facts since some are needed to survive and to live well, but many are trivial and can even distract us from the good life. For instance, it doesn't matter whether Milo of Croton won five or six Olympic titles, whether the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is the same person, whether the Ford Mustang SVT Cobra R is superior to the Ford Mustang 2 King Cobra, or whether powder creamer is as tasty as liquid creamer (Sen. *On the Shortness of Life*, 13–14). Philosophers' indifference to trivial empirical facts suggests that they do not hate having false beliefs about such facts. If they do not hate having false beliefs about all matters of fact, then Socrates' claim that everyone hates genuine falsehoods implies that genuine falsehoods are not false beliefs about all matters of fact.

Admittedly, the mental state of the philosophers in these passages might be better described as ignorance (understood as having no thoughts at all) rather than false belief. Thus, these passages do not conclusively demonstrate that philosophers are indifferent to possessing false beliefs about certain facts. There are two points to note in response to this worry. First, the distinction between ignorance and false belief is rather insignificant in the present context because both are defective cognitive dispositions, and we know that genuine falsehoods are defective cognitive dispositions. Hence, since genuine falsehoods are hated by everyone, any example of someone being indifferent to false beliefs *or* ignorance about matters of fact tells against the "false beliefs about matters of fact" reading of genuine falsehoods.

Second, it is reasonable to assume that someone who is indifferent to certain facts will be indifferent to possessing false beliefs about those facts. It would be strange for someone to hate having false beliefs about the sorts of things for which she has cultivated a general attitude of indifference. This is especially true in the case of philosophers, who are wise enough to know that possessing at least some false beliefs is inevitable. The fact that people are fallible and sometimes deceitful means that some of the things we learn from others are bound to be false. Yet, the philosopher doesn't despond over this and spend her free time attempting to confirm every detail of the history she learned in school or verifying the account of a recent sporting event that she overheard in the marketplace. What she genuinely hates is not false belief per se but false belief about things that actually matter.

Finally, interpreting genuine falsehoods as false beliefs about matters of fact has unsavory consequences that feed into Popperesque totalitarian worries about the Kallipolis (see Popper 1966). If everyone hates genuine falsehoods most of all, and the lies told by the rulers produce genuine falsehoods (understood as false beliefs about matters of fact), then philosophers are giving citizens something that they truly hate. The problem is worse, however, because Socrates doesn't merely say that genuine falsehoods are hated by everyone (382c4–5) but that they are also worthy of hatred (382c7–8). After discussing everyone's negative attitude towards genuine falsehoods (382c4–5), Socrates returns to falsehoods in words by explaining that they do not always merit hatred (ὥστε μὴ ἄξιον εἶναι μίσους) because they can be useful (382c7–8). The smooth transition from hatred at c4–5 to worthy of hatred at c7–8 suggests that the latter idea was implicit in the previous passages.[13] If this is right, then the reading in question implies that the philosopher-rulers do things to the citizens that merits their hatred. It would be preferable to find a reading that doesn't have this unwelcome implication.[14]

Taking stock, while interpreting genuine falsehoods as false beliefs about matters of fact fits with some of Socrates' language in the key passage (such as the emphasis on the location of the falsehood, *semnos*, and *ta onta*), this reading has several disadvantages. The main difficulties stem from the need to account for Socrates' description of genuine falsehoods as being about "the most authoritative things." Thus, it would be wise to explore interpretations that restrict "the most authoritative things" to a specific domain. A second desideratum for an interpretation is that it coheres with Socrates' claim that genuine falsehoods are hated by everyone and worthy of hatred. Hence, a plausible constraint that we can place on our search is the "symmetry thesis," which holds that there is a symmetry between the lies that are beneficial or harmful to tell and the falsehoods that are beneficial or harmful to possess. The symmetry thesis prohibits useful falsehoods from being about "the most authoritative things" because those falsehoods are hated by everyone and worthy of hatred. By having the symmetry thesis in place, we can mitigate Popper-style worries because in Socrates' eyes the falsehoods in the city are neither hated by all citizens nor worthy of hatred because they are beneficial.[15] With this in mind, let us turn our attention to the question of what exactly the most authoritative things are.[16]

1.3 The Most Authoritative Things

There are two plausible candidates for what Socrates means by the most authoritative things at 2.382a–d: either he means basic ethical issues concerning how one should live or he has in mind more robust metaphysical or philosophical matters, such as the Forms. In this section, we will argue that the former provides the best interpretation.

1.3.1 Ethical Matters

The key to understanding what Socrates means by the most authoritative things is found in the passages that immediately precede and follow 382a–d. In Book 2, just before discussing the genuine falsehood, Socrates complains to Adeimantus that the poets depict the gods acting immorally. He says, "Telling the greatest falsehood [*to megiston pseudos*] about the most important things [*tōn megistōn*] doesn't make a fine story" (377e6–7). The example he gives is of Uranus, Cronus, and Zeus acting unjustly (377e). The story is not fine because it depicts the gods acting in despicable ways, and this sends the wrong message to the audience of the poems (378b).[17] This passage suggests that the most important things have to do with ethics and how justice is portrayed. If the gods are depicted as acting unjustly, stories like this will make the citizens believe that acting unjustly is acceptable—perhaps even praiseworthy. This will lead the citizens to cultivate the wrong psychological dispositions; as a result, they will mistake good for bad and bad for good.[18]

This worry is echoed in Socrates' criticism of the poets in Book 3:

> Because I think we'll say that what poets and prose-writers tell us about the most important matters [*ta megista*] concerning human beings is bad. They say that many unjust people are happy and many just ones wretched, that injustice is profitable if it escapes detection, and that justice is another's good but one's own loss. I think we'll prohibit these stories and order the poets to compose the opposite kind of poetry and tell the opposite kind of tales.
>
> (392a12–b5)

In this passage, the most important matters concerning human beings are explained in terms of how justice relates to happiness. It is dangerous to teach the citizens that justice leads to unhappiness and that injustice leads to happiness. Stories like this will mislead citizens about what is good and bad, thereby leading them to cultivate bad psychological dispositions.

Indeed, we find something quite similar in Book 10 when Socrates returns to examining the merits of poetry. When revisiting the decision to bar Homer and other poets from the city in Book 10, at first glance it seems that Socrates bases his decision on the claim that the poets' stories are imitative and not true (598a–b). Nonetheless, it soon becomes clear that his primary concern is whether Homer's portrayal of ethical issues is corruptive:

> Let's pass over all that [i.e. the portrayal of doctors and other crafts]. But about the most important [*megistōn*] and finest things of which Homer undertakes to speak—warfare, generalship, city government,

> and people's education—about these it *is* just to question him, asking him this: "Homer, if you're not third from the truth about virtue, the sort of craftsman of images that we defined an imitator to be, but if you're second and capable of knowing what ways of life make people better in private or in public, then tell us which cities are better governed because of you …" Will he be able to name one?
>
> (599c6–e4)

After this, Socrates examines how imitative poetry corrupts the soul, even of good men (602c–608b). Hence, in Book 10, just as in Books 2 and 3, Socrates isn't concerned about all truths but ethical truths and their practical effects, and "the most important things" explicitly refers to ethical matters.

Hence, in the passages that surround 382a–d and those that discuss poetry more broadly, "the most important things" (*ta megista*) are ethical matters (see also *Leg.* 10.890b). However, what reason do we have for thinking that "the most important things" (*ta megista*) are "the most authoritative things" (*ta kuriōtata*)? The gap between *ta megista* and *ta kuriōtata* is bridged in Book 3. Having just discussed the types of music and poetry that are beneficial for education, Socrates asserts that education in music and poetry is "the most authoritative" (*kuriōtatē*) (401d4–5) because it can affect one's psychology and actions in the greatest way (401d–e). Music and poetry do this in two ways. First, because rhythm and harmony permeate the inner part of the soul more than anything else, they can affect it in the strongest way. Second, a proper education in music and poetry allows one to recognize *that* something is fine and good, even if one doesn't understand *why* something is fine and good (401d–402a). Thus, the most authoritative form of education is music and poetry because a proper education in these supplies one with the basic psychological dispositions necessary for living well. This was the same reason why the stories at 2.377e and 3.392b are the most important—they concern fundamental ethical issues about how to live. Therefore, we hold that the most authoritative things are the same as the most important things (i.e. ethical issues).[19]

A further point in favor of the ethics reading is that it provides the best explanation for why everyone would hate being ignorant about the most authoritative things and why such ignorance merits hatred. All human beings have a desire to live well, and rightfully so. Indeed, it is a basic Socratic commitment that everyone desires that which is good (*Prt.* 352a–c and 358b–d; *Meno* 77b–78b; *Grg.* 468b), and it seems to be the foundational element of Greek ethics that we all seek *eudaimonia* (*Cri.* 48b; *Euthyd.* 278e, 282a; *Symp.* 204e–206e; *Resp.* 6.505d; and *Eth. Nic.* 1.4, 7–8, 13; cf. White 2002 and Schuh 2019). People can be complacent with the mere appearance of many things but never about whether or not their life is going well (see *Leg.* 3.688c–689d). We don't want a life

that merely appears good but is actually awful—that would be hated and indeed most worthy of hatred. While it makes sense for people to hate having false beliefs about matters of ethics, it is less plausible that everyone hates having false beliefs about all matters of fact (as on the reading considered in the previous section). And it is even less plausible that everyone hates having false beliefs about highly abstract entities that they are unlikely to have ever considered.[20] This latter idea is a commitment of the proponents of the Forms reading, to which we now turn.

1.3.2 The Forms

An alternative interpretation of "the most authoritative things" holds that they are metaphysical or philosophical things, such as the Forms. On this reading, the genuine falsehood is ignorance about these abstract entities. The most thorough defenses of this position are found in David Simpson's (2007) and Raphael Woolf's (2009) respective works (see also De Chiara-Quenzer 1994, 34; D. Williams 2013; and Smith 2019).[21] These authors point out that in Books 6 and 7, Socrates maintains that the most important subject of learning (*megiston mathēma*) is the Form of the Good (see 6.505a, 6.508e, 7.515b, 7.526e, and 7.534c). Additionally, in Book 7, Socrates describes the Form of the Good as having authority (*kurios*) in the intelligible realm and providing truth and understanding (517c). This provides some evidence for thinking of the Forms as the most authoritative things. Further, Plato makes it clear in the *Republic* that understanding the Forms is more important than merely possessing true beliefs about basic facts. The interpretation championed by Simpson and Woolf coheres with this prioritizing of the Forms. Lastly, at 2.382b2, Socrates says that genuine falsehoods are about "the things that are" (*ta onta*) and later in the *Republic* (Books 5–7), Plato argues that "the things that are" are the Forms. This is additional evidence that Plato is talking about the Forms at 382b2.

Nevertheless, this interpretation faces three serious problems. First, if Socrates is talking about the Forms at 382a–d, then his explanation of genuine falsehoods is even more elusive and cryptic than it first appears. This is because 382a–d is sandwiched between discussions that are primarily about education and not about metaphysics. The educational discussion primarily explores what educational policies will cultivate the correct dispositions in the citizens. Hence, it would make more sense for the genuine falsehoods to be more directly about ethics and not about something that will be introduced much later in the text. And since the Forms haven't yet been introduced in the dialogue, it would be especially strange for Socrates to insist that in introducing the distinction between the different falsehoods he isn't saying anything deep.

Second, it would be strange for Socrates to say that genuine falsehoods are hated and feared most of all by everyone if they concern only the

Forms because most human beings do not have an explicit conception of a Form. We grant that non-philosophers can implicitly conceive of Forms—a person facing a conflict might attempt to reflect on an impartial standard of goodness or a carpenter might examine a table against an ideal in her mind—but it is still strange to say that ordinary people are most afraid of having false beliefs about entities that are so obtuse and distant from their ordinary thoughts. Additionally, most people don't seem bothered by their general ignorance of reality (and especially its underlying nature), as we noted earlier. Relatedly, it is a pessimistic interpretation of an orderly Kallipolean producer, who does all that is asked of him, to describe his ignorance of the Forms as being worthy of hatred. Since a proper understanding of the Forms is beyond the capability of most people, the idea that such ignorance merits hatred is rather bleak. As we explained above, the ethical reading does better on this front because even the most ordinary human being has a basic concept of ethical behavior, character, and living well. If the genuine falsehoods are about ethics rather than Forms, then regular citizens have a realistic chance of minimizing the hateworthy elements of their psychology. Of course, the inability of ordinary people to apprehend the Form of the Good will prevent them from becoming perfectly just. But it is at least possible for them to make genuine progress towards living well by becoming productive and upright citizens.

Third, the Forms reading comes close to violating the symmetry thesis. According to the symmetry thesis, the lies told by the rulers shouldn't facilitate genuine falsehoods (which always merit hatred) in those receiving the lies. Although it is true that the useful falsehoods are not lies about the Forms, they certainly do not help one escape the sensible realm; rather, they replace certain claims about this realm with other claims about it as a means of promoting positive ethical behavior. This is problematic for the Forms reading because it would be strange if the useful falsehoods helped sustain hateworthy genuine falsehoods in individuals. In contrast, if the most authoritative things are ethical matters, we have a clear explanation of how useful falsehoods can help remove and prevent genuine falsehoods. Thus, the ethics reading does a better job of maintaining the symmetry thesis.

In addition to these problems, note that the passages that ostensibly support the Forms interpretation don't actually provide an advantage over the ethics interpretation. The fact that Socrates describes the Form of the Good as important and as an authority doesn't support the Forms interpretation over the ethics interpretation because the Form of the Good is central to ethical matters. On our view, the Form of the Good still plays an important metaethical role by providing a stance-independent ground for ethical truth, and it plays an important epistemic role by completing one's ethical education. What we deny, however, is that humans need to understand the Forms or even inquire into them in order

to live well—and we maintain that living well has practical priority over everything else. Therefore, the fact that Socrates calls the Form of the Good important or an authority is not decisive against our view given the important metaphysical and epistemic role that it can play.

We thus see that the ethics reading has several advantages over the Forms reading. There is, however, one point on which the Forms reading appears to have an advantage. Recall Plato's statement that genuine falsehoods are about "the things that are" (382b2). The ethics reading implies that "the things that are" are ethical matters. This seems to suggest that ethical facts are more real or fundamental than other things, which is problematic because it seems to grate against the Platonic commitment that the Forms have metaphysical priority.

While this is a weak point for the ethics reading, it is not as problematic as it appears. Note first that the locution "the things that are" can be short for saying "the things that are most real," where "real" here means something like "most important." As we have seen, there are multiple examples of Socrates referring to ethical considerations as the most important things. This is related to a second and more important point which is that the two central questions of the *Republic* are "What is justice?" and "Is it always better to be just than unjust?" These are ethical questions. Now it is true that in Books 5–7 Socrates makes it clear that *complete* individual justice and happiness require understanding deep metaphysical truths, and a city being just and flourishing requires a ruler who understands these things. Nonetheless, these metaphysical discussions are explored for the purpose of figuring out how we ought to live and govern ourselves collectively. Given that these metaphysical issues are explored for the sake of discovering ethical truths, it isn't so strange to think of ethics as having priority over metaphysics.

Taking stock of the pros and cons of each interpretation, the ethics reading appears to us as not only the most plausible but also the most interesting. The ethics interpretation reminds the reader of the practical concerns that situate and ground the project of the *Republic*, and it provides a more optimistic account of the cognitive state of non-philosophers.

1.4 Ethical Commitments

We have argued that it is better to interpret the most authoritative things as ethical matters rather than as philosophical or metaphysical entities. However, one might wonder whether all ethical beliefs count as being about the most authoritative things or whether it is only a particular subset. Here it will be helpful to distinguish between two types of ethical belief. The first type concerns convictions about how one ought to live and what one ought to pursue. Let us call such beliefs "ethical commitments." The second type of ethical belief concerns deep explanations for why certain pursuits and ways of living are more

choiceworthy than others. Call these beliefs "ethical explanations."[22] Note that one could have a correct ethical commitment while having an incorrect ethical explanation corresponding to it. For instance, one might have the conviction that one ought to donate to charity and volunteer (correct ethical commitment) while believing that these practices are made right solely by the fact that Apollo ordains it (false ethical explanation) (cf. Kant G 4:397).

We maintain that genuine falsehoods are false ethical commitments. Evidence for this comes from the beneficial false beliefs in the *Republic*. The first example occurs in Book 2 at 377e–378a. Socrates asserts that stories about the gods acting unjustly tell the greatest falsehood about the most important things. Following this, he says, "But even if it were true, it should be passed over in silence and not told to foolish and young people" (378a2–4).[23] In this passage, Socrates is explicitly stating that even if it were true that the gods act unjustly, people should not be told this (except in extreme circumstances). The context of the passage implies that the citizens should be told stories in which the gods always act justly, even if these stories are completely false.[24]

Socrates would be willing to sacrifice the truth about the gods because he recognizes that the stories people hear about the gods influence their ethical commitments (see 2.377a–b, 2.378a–b, and 2.380b–c; see also *Euthphr*. 5d–6d). We can represent this belief-formation process with the following model:

A reasons that:

1. I should emulate the gods.
2. The gods φ.
3. I should φ.

Now provided that the citizens form ethical commitments in this way, Socrates is concerned that if it were the case that the gods acted unjustly and people knew this fact, people would form the false ethical commitment that they should act unjustly. We can represent Socrates' concern as follows:

A reasons that:

1. I should emulate the gods. (False)[25]
2. The gods act unjustly. (True)
3. I should act unjustly. (False)

Hence, because of this worry, even if it were true that the gods act unjustly, the citizens should be told the falsehood that the gods never act unjustly. This false belief about the gods would be beneficial because it would produce the true ethical commitment that people should always act justly. This can be represented as follows:

A reasons that:

1. I should emulate the gods. (False)
2. The gods always act justly. (False)
3. I should always act justly. (True)

The false ethical explanation in this example is that one should always act justly because the gods always act justly. However, Socrates is tolerant of this false belief because it will lead people to act rightly by giving them a true ethical commitment. This suggests that he is tolerant of false ethical explanations when they produce true ethical commitments.

The second example comes right after the first. Socrates asserts that he doesn't want the citizens to be told stories about the gods hating and warring with one another because this will make the citizens think that this behavior is appropriate. Because of this, he proposes that the poets adopt new stories:

> But if we're to persuade our people that no citizen has ever hated another and that it's impious to do so, then that's what should be told to children from the beginning by old men and women; and as these children grow older, poets should be compelled to tell them the same sort of thing.
>
> (2.378c6–d2)

Socrates recognizes that people imitate behaviors that they take to be ordinary or normal (378b). If people are told stories about citizens never hating one another, they will think that it is abnormal to hate a fellow citizen, and this will lead them to judge that such behavior is inappropriate. We can represent the structure of the belief-formation process as follows:

A reasons that:

1. I should act in ways that are ordinary and should not act in ways that are not ordinary.
2. It is not ordinary to φ.
3. I should not φ.

And the corresponding model:

A reasons that:

1. I should act in ways that are ordinary and should not act in ways that are not ordinary. (False)
2. No citizen has ever hated a fellow citizen. That is, it is ordinary for citizens not to hate one another and it is not ordinary for them to hate one another. (False)
3. I should not hate my fellow citizens. (True)

Although belief 1 and belief 2 are false, they play an instrumental role in producing the true ethical commitment that citizens should not hate each other. Moreover, it is important to note that belief 2 does a better job of producing this true ethical commitment than if people were told the truth about human behavior. For instance, imagine that the citizens were told: "Although it is impious to hate one another, this behavior is not that uncommon, for it is actually quite ordinary for humans to fight with each other." Provided that people naturally formulate ethical commitments based partly upon what is deemed ordinary or normal, such stories may lead citizens to conclude that it is permissible to sometimes hate one another.

The third example is the infamous noble lie (3.414b–415c).[26] In Book 3, Socrates and Glaucon agree that in order to create the appropriate structure for their utopian city they need a creation story upon which to found the city. The citizens will be told that everything up until this point has been a dream, and that while they were dreaming, their real selves were being created and nurtured inside the earth.[27] Because the earth is their mother, they are all related. Despite the fact that all citizens are related, different citizens have different metals in their souls: some gold, some silver, some bronze, and some iron and brass (see Hes. *Op*. 106–201). The myth serves two fundamental purposes. First, it unifies the city by making the citizens think that they are all related.[28] Second, it separates the city by putting the citizens into distinct classes (see Bloom 1991, 365–369 and Schofield 2007, 2009). The unifying aspect benefits the citizens by facilitating harmonious relations among them. Additionally, it gives the auxiliaries and the ruling class a personal reason to care about the well-being of the producers, which in turn prevents the auxiliaries from bullying the weaker citizens (416a–b). The separating aspect of the myth provides the members of different classes with an explanation for why these members have different positions and obligations within society. The idea is that such an explanation will lead the citizens to believe that their place in the city is not arbitrary and oppressive but reflects their true nature crafted by the gods (see also the principle of specialization at 2.370a–c and 2.374a–e). The hope is that this justification for the class system will reduce the likelihood that citizens question the political structure of the city and resent individuals from different classes.

Because there are two different aspects of the noble lie, we will analyze each aspect separately. The unifying aspect develops or sustains the following three beliefs.

A reasons that:

1. I should care for my relatives. (True)
2. All citizens are related to one another. (False)
3. I should care for my fellow citizens. (True)

Socrates is cleverly playing off the natural belief that people should care for their relatives. Hence, by making the citizens falsely believe that they are all relatives, the citizens are led to the true ethical commitment that they should care for their fellow citizens.

The separating feature of the noble lie has a similar structure. This aspect produces and sustains the following beliefs:

A reasons that:

1. Different citizens have different metals in their souls. (False)
2. People with different metals in their souls are suited to different tasks, such that people with metal *M* should φ and shouldn't ψ. (False)
3. I have *M*. (False)
4. I should φ and shouldn't ψ. (True)

Beliefs 1–3 provide the relevant background and justification for the true ethical commitment.

Each of these examples has roughly the same structure.[29] The citizens are given false ethical explanations in order to produce and sustain true ethical commitments. This suggests that the most authoritative things are ethical in nature, and that genuine falsehoods are false ethical commitments (see Page 1991, 17). Interpreting genuine falsehoods in this way provides a clear explanation for why they are always hated by gods and humans. In Book 4, Plato equates justice to psychological health (444d–445b). He maintains that just actions create and sustain psychological health, while unjust actions create and sustain psychological disharmony. Thus, genuine falsehoods are pernicious because ethical commitments are inextricably tied to one's well-being and indirectly tied to the well-being of others. For example, if *A* has a false ethical commitment (i.e. a genuine falsehood), her false belief will lead her to act wrongly, and this will harm her well-being and likely the well-being of her fellow citizens. Therefore, because *A*'s well-being is tied to the ethical quality of her actions, it is the greatest error for *A* to be mistaken about how she should live. However, it is much less of a concern if *A* is mistaken about the deep explanation of why she should perform an action, as long as the action she is performing is appropriate. This best explains why all citizens would most fear and hate the genuine falsehood—no one wants to live a wretched life.

It is worth pausing here to address two potential concerns about our reading. First, one might wonder why individuals should not be given both the correct ethical commitments and the correct ethical explanations. Isn't it bad for people to not understand the reasons why some actions are right and others are wrong? It certainly would be better if everyone were capable of understanding deep ethical explanations, but as the class structure in the *Republic* suggests, Plato is skeptical that this

is possible. Moreover, as the allegory of the cave suggests, it is dangerous to try to impart these truths directly:

> SOC.: Wouldn't it be said of him [i.e. the philosopher] that he'd returned from his upward journey with his eyesight ruined and that it isn't worthwhile even to try to travel upward? And, as for anyone who tried to free them [i.e. the non-philosophers] and lead them upward, if they could somehow get their hands on him, wouldn't they kill him?
> GLAU.: They certainly would. (517a2–7)

This passage demonstrates that philosophers must teach non-philosophers indirectly because a direct approach is disruptive and hazardous. The indirect approach involves teaching music, poetry, and religion that focuses on correct ethical commitments. The ultimate explanations behind correct ethical commitments might be beyond the reach of all citizens, but with the correct ethical commitments in place, all citizens could make some progress up the intellectual ladder. For example, citizens might not ever learn about the Forms, but they could move beyond mere religious reasons for hating injustice (e.g. divine punishment or that the gods hate injustice). They might come to see that certain acts cause disharmony and break up civic unity, and that this is why they shouldn't be done. Thus, the problem with the direct approach is that citizens must first develop the appropriate beliefs and affective states in order to be receptive to more robust ethical explanations, and without these character traits, they will be prone to rejecting these explanations outright. [30]

Second, one might object that we haven't actually shown that falsehoods are sometimes preferred to truth, we have only shown that fictions are sometimes preferred to directly asserting truth. This is because what we have been calling "useful falsehoods" are really just useful fictions. The following passage of Hannah Arendt captures this sentiment well:

> I hope no one will tell me anymore that Plato was the inventor of the "noble lie." This belief rested on a misreading of a crucial passage (414c) in the *Republic*, where Plato speaks of one of his myths—a "Phoenician tale"—as a *pseudos*. Since the same Greek word signifies "fiction," "error," and "lie" according to context … under no circumstances can it be understood as a recommendation of lying as we understand it.
>
> (1968, 298n5; see also *Resp*. 2.377a and endnote 1)

By no means does Plato intend the noble lie to be malicious or oppressive, and insofar as "lying" is understood to mean "malicious deception," we agree with Arendt. Moreover, we are also in agreement that the context is essential for understanding what a particular passage means—not

all Platonic myths, or even discussions, need to be taken literally. That being said, the context here renders "fiction" a bad translation for three reasons.

First, when Socrates introduces the idea of useful falsehoods at 2.382c–d, he doesn't differentiate between myths about the past and lying to a friend who is about to do something harmful. This is supported by the fact that when Socrates brings up the noble lie (3.414b–c) and the rigged sexual lottery (5.459c–560c) he draws no real ethical, ontological, or epistemic distinctions between them, but holds them on a par with each other as useful falsehoods. This is significant because there is no plausible way to maintain that the rigged sexual lottery is a fiction or allegory (Brickhouse and Smith 1983, 83–84, 94n10), and if this is so, then he is thinking of the noble lie in the same way that he is thinking of an overt lie.

Second, when Socrates discusses the noble lie, it is stressed several times that citizens might not believe it (3.414c6–e; see Chapter 7). If he were merely presenting a fiction or an allegory, he wouldn't be so worried about whether the citizens accept the statements as true. Thus, the noble lie is to be presented as a religious and historical truth, which Socrates is hoping all citizens will believe.[31]

Third, Socrates makes it clear that not all citizens understand myths allegorically, but many interpret them as factive. As he explains: "The young can't distinguish what is allegorical from what isn't, and the beliefs they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable" (2.378d6–e2). Thus, even the more fictional features of the useful falsehoods will produce false beliefs in citizens.

1.5 The Priority of the Practical

With respect to Plato's view of truth and falsehood, this chapter has three significant results. First, it provides compelling evidence for the falsity of the Absolutist Evaluative Claim: once we see that the useful falsehoods of the *Republic* are lies that produce false beliefs, and that Socrates thinks that the success of the city depends on their cultivation and stability, we cannot accept the claim that falsehood is never preferable to truth. Second, if we are right that the genuine falsehood—that is, the purest and most hated falsehood—concerns being ignorant of ethical commitments, and that ethical commitments have priority over basic facts, metaphysical claims, and ethical explanations, then it follows that there is a hierarchy of truth and falsehood in terms of both purity and value. This is significant because while all citizens of the Kallipolis are capable of having true ethical commitments, not all of them are capable of having knowledge of the Forms, or even true ethical explanations. This means that the ignorance of the non-philosophers is less damning than on alternative readings because they needn't be hopelessly ignorant about the

most important things. Third, this chapter shows that, in general, practical concerns have a priority over theoretical concerns—the fact that a belief is false is far less important than the fact that believing it will help produce and sustain correct ethical commitments.

We recognize that some might be hesitant to accept all of these conclusions. This is understandable; as Socrates says, the beliefs that we hold at an early age are very hard to erase (2.378d–e). Most of us were taught some version of the Alethic Interpretation when first introduced to Plato. Moreover, our dispositions as philosophers naturally incline us towards an alethic stance since we are trained to love the true and eschew the false. Nonetheless, subsequent chapters will build upon and support the views developed here. In the next chapter, we will see that useful falsehoods are not an anomaly of the Kallipolis, but are also fundamental to Magnesia, the city Plato develops in the *Laws*. As will become clear, the useful falsehoods in Magnesia have the same structure as those of the Kallipolis, thereby lending credence to the claims defended thus far.

Notes

1 See Grote (1888, vol. 4, 151–159); Barrow (2010, 98); Guthrie (1975, 475–479); Arendt (1968, 298n5); Levinson (1953, 428–438); and Cornford (1941, 65–66, 100–101).

2 B. Williams (2002, 273) writes, "It is generally agreed that the etymology of ἀληθής [*alēthēs*] lies in α-privative and the root *lath-*, which is to be found in λήθη [*lēthē*] and λανθάνω [*lanthanō*], and covers forgetfulness but also things escaping people's notice or being ignored." Heidegger (see Wrathall 2011) emphasized "unconcealed," while Detienne (1996) emphasized "unforgotten." For a recent discussion of the ways Platonic truth is broader than propositional truth, see Hestir (2016), Rowett (2018, Chaps. 1–2), and Smith (2019). As our discussion proceeds, we will start to use "truth" and "falsehood" in a more qualified way.

3 For a discussion on Greek fiction, see Pratt (1993) and Gill and Wiseman (1993); see also Bloom (1991, xvii–xix, 365). The ordinary Greek view on the morality of lying is complex and varied (as is that of our own culture). Generally speaking, lying to one's friends and fellow citizens about relevant information was viewed negatively, yet there are times when such lies were viewed as necessary and beneficial; lying to one's enemies, in contrast, wasn't generally looked down upon, though sometimes this too was viewed as inappropriate. For a discussion on the common Greek conception of lying, see Zembaty (1988).

4 We will begin by translating *pseudos* in this passage as "falsehood" since it is more neutral than "lie"; eventually, we will argue that Plato is contrasting a genuine falsehood with a lie. Additionally, Plato's distinction here isn't meant to exhaust the ways that something can be false.

5 *Akratos* refers to wine unmixed with water, or simply, pure wine; hence, a "not entirely unmixed/pure falsehood" means something like "impure falsehood" or "diluted falsehood."

6 In the *Hippias Minor* (365b–371e), Socrates argues that the best liars know the truth; see also *Resp*. 1.334a–b. Another possible reading of falsehood in words is that the category includes all spoken falsehood including both lies and inadvertent ignorant statements. On this reading, "imitation" here just

means "copy" and doesn't include any aspect of "impersonating." We will not explore this issue further because it is incidental to our overall purpose. As we explained above and will further explain below, the ethical differences between lying, not speaking the whole truth, myth-telling, and uttering false statements do not really concern Socrates. Rather, his primary concern is who is speaking, what they are saying, and how this will affect others.

7 This follows a basic Platonic methodology of distinguishing things in terms of appearance and reality, as well as treating predicates as gradable. The account of epistemology and metaphysics in Books 5–7 present a classic example of this (Vlastos 1973, Chap. 3; Gerson 2009, Chap. 3; Smith 2019; cf. Fine 2003, Chaps. 3–4), as does the *Symposium*'s "ladder of love" (210a–212c). Thus, falsehoods in words are still false, they are just less false than the genuine falsehood in the same way that wine mixed with a bit of water becomes less pure while still being wine.

8 Note that *doxa* need not itself be understood as "belief," since around this time many Greeks assumed that something couldn't be both *doxa* and *epistēme* (knowledge or understanding) (see Moss and Schwab, 2019; Rowett, Chaps. 1–2; and Vogt 2012, Introduction). Thus, *doxa*, for a typical Greek, corresponds to something closer to "mere belief" or "opinion."

9 Socrates will use "ignorance" (*agnōsia*) in a technical sense at 5.476e–478d (see Smith 2012). We believe that his use of "ignorance," "belief," and "knowledge" in Books 5–7 isn't intended to apply to all of his uses of these concepts, and that he never loses sight of the more ordinary conceptions of these words.

10 Brickhouse and Smith (1983, 86) also defend an extended use of "true" in the *Republic*. For a criticism, see Woolf (2009, 17). For a new defense of this reading, see Rowett (2018) and Smith (2019). Although we are sympathetic to such readings and believe that Plato sometimes uses "truth" and "falsehood" non-propositionally (e.g. "true in deed"), we also think that he sometimes uses these terms propositionally (e.g. "true in word").

11 Annas (1981, 107), Schofield (2007, 144–48), and Wild (1953, 51–53) appear to adopt such a position, although Schofield seems to vacillate on the issue, see 148n15. Kelsey (2013), in response to Woolf (2009), defends a version of the Alethic Interpretation, but he doesn't address this passage in detail.

12 Waterfield (1998, 438) suggests that the contrast is between consciously lying and unconsciously lying. He understands "unconscious lying" to involve unknowingly saying false things and general vanity. However, "general vanity" seems coextensive with possessing falsehood.

13 The idea that Socrates isn't just describing what people hate or reject is indicated by his saying both that individuals "would least of all accept" genuine falsehoods (382b3–4), and that no one voluntarily accepts them (382a7–9). It is a basic Socratic commitment that no one voluntarily accepts bad things; given that people do seem to voluntarily accept bad things, Socrates must have a more reflective notion of voluntary acceptance (i.e. what you would accept if you were informed of the relevant facts) (see 3.413a and 9.589c; *Grg*. 472b and 475e–476a). We are largely sympathetic to Kamtekar (2017), who argues that what renders wrongdoing involuntary isn't ignorance, but that everyone has a natural desire for their own good and that wrongdoing impedes this desire.

14 Annas (1981, 107–108), who defends a version of the "false beliefs about matters of fact" reading, acknowledges the unsavoriness of it (see also Dombrowski 1997, 574–575; Fite 1934, 24–29).

15 We say "mitigate" because broad concerns about paternalism and deception will not entirely go away even with the symmetry thesis in place. Nonetheless,

the symmetry thesis at least ensures that Socrates views the lies in the Kallipolis as being beneficial for the citizens.

16 Some scholars hold that the text contains only one relevant distinction at play: the distinction between *pseudos* concerning important things and *pseudos* concerning unimportant things (Reeve 2004, xx–xxii; Lear 2006; and Simpson 2007, 345). These readings lack precision because at 382b Socrates explains that one *pseudos* is located in the soul and the other is in words. Accordingly, this reading fails to account for the difference in location. Moreover, the distinction cannot simply be between *pseudos* that are useful and *pseudos* that are not because not all *pseudos* in words are useful—some are worthy of hatred.

17 Page (1991, 9) takes this to show that the "biggest things" (*ta megista*) have to do with the cosmic order that "dwarf the specifically human." However, this interpretation misses the point of the passage, which is primarily about education. Plato is concerned that because humans admire the gods, humans will want to behave like the gods. Hence, if humans hear that the gods act unjustly, humans will act unjustly. This is why these stories deal with the most important things; see 2.377a–b, 2.378a–b, 2.380b–c, 3.386a–c, 3.388b–d, 3.389d–e, and 3.391d.

18 At 2.377d–e, Socrates condemns these stories saying that they "create a bad image of what the gods and heroes are like, just as a painter might paint a picture that isn't at all like the things he is trying to paint." One might take this to demonstrate that Socrates' criticism is not that these stories cause harmful dispositions, but that they are simply inaccurate. However, 377e–378a reveals that this cannot be the case because even if these stories were true they "should be passed over in silence and not told to foolish and young people."

19 The views articulated by Page (1991), G. Ferrari (1989, 112), Morgan (2000, 164), and Reeve (1988, Chap. 4 and 2004, xx–xxii) have affinities with the ethics reading. Note that at 2.382a Grube/Reeve (Plato 1997) translate *ta kuriōtata* as "the most important things." This choice of translation is likely motivated by the plausible assumption that the most authoritative things are coextensive with the most important things.

20 We acknowledge that some people might be concerned about certain Forms related to their particular interests or professions (e.g. mathematical Forms for mathematicians). But even these people would be most concerned to avoid having false beliefs about goodness and flourishing. Presumably, they engage in their mathematical pursuits on the assumption that this is a good way for them to spend their time.

21 There are two main versions of this reading: the most authoritative things include either all the Forms or only the Form of the Good. We will consider both versions together for the sake of simplicity.

22 The distinction between ethical commitments and ethical explanations tracks the educational distinction made in Book 3 between grasping *that* something is fine and good, and grasping *why* it is so; see 3.401d–402a; *Eth. Nic.* 1.4.1095b2–8; E. Brown 2004, 286; and Gill 1996, Chap. 4.

23 It is clear from this context that Socrates doesn't think that the gods are unjust; see also *Leg.* 12.941b–c. Grube/Reeve (Plato 1997) translate ἄφρονάς τε καὶ νέους as "foolish young people." We agree with Woolf (2009, 12n8) that this passage should be translated as "foolish and young people." Plato explicitly includes adults in his discussion of music and poetry; see also 2.378c–d, 2.380c, and 3.387b.

24 Strictly speaking, Socrates doesn't actually say that they should be told a falsehood. He says only that they should not be told the truth. However, it can be inferred from the context that they will be told a falsehood.

25 Belief 1 is false because if the gods act unjustly, it isn't the case that people should emulate the gods in this way.
26 *Gennaios* means "noble" as in "well-bred" or "high-born," but it can also refer to either the usefulness or the massiveness of the lie (see Page 1991, 21 and Schofield 2007, 138).
27 Lear (2006, 32–34) insightfully points out how this aspect of the noble lie is epistemically revolutionary in the sense that it tells one that everything up until this point has been a dream. However, we disagree with his claim that this aspect of the noble lie will teach citizens to recognize allegory as allegory. This seems like an overinterpretation: this aspect of the noble lie is simply intended to erase the other myths so that the founders of the city can instill new myths. Note that this aspect of the lie is referencing the story in which Thebans sprang from Cadmus, a Phoenician prince, sowing a serpent's teeth; see *Apollod* 3.4.1 and *Leg*. 2.663–664c.
28 Additionally, as Bloom (1991, 366) explains, because the land on which the Kallipolis is founded is taken through force, the citizens are vulnerable to developing the belief that it is the right of the stronger to take what they want from the weaker. The unifying aspect of the noble lie "provides for that eventuality by concealing the unjust origin of this regime … On the basis of the lie, the citizens can in all good faith and conscience take pride in the justice of their regime, and malcontents have no justification for rebellion. Such are the advantages of autochthony."
29 The other beneficial false beliefs in the Kallipolis also provide false ethical explanations for the sake of promoting true ethical commitments (see Socrates' discussion of communal living arrangements (3.416e–417b), the rigged sexual lottery (5.459c–460c), myths about death in war (5.468e–469d), and the myth of Er (10.614b–621b)). We are omitting these examples to avoid unnecessary repetition.
30 Woolf (2009, 21) says, "That someone is not philosophical, by contrast, makes it not bad but pointless to impart certain truths, namely the philosophical ones; for they could not be grasped by such a person." We disagree: 7.517a suggests that it is not just pointless, but that it is harmful and bad to try to communicate these truths—sometimes we shouldn't be gadflies (cf. *Ap*. 30e).
31 We are not saying that religion and history need to be accepted in the same way as one accepts something like a philosophical argument, but we are saying that they need to be accepted in a more robust way than as a mere story.

2 Ethical Commitments and Persuasion in the *Laws*

> Whether atoms or a natural order, the first premise must be that I am part of the Whole which is governed by nature: the second, that I have some close relationship with the other kindred parts. With these premises in mind, in so far as I am a part, I shall not resent anything assigned by the Whole. Nothing which benefits the Whole can be harmful to the part, and the Whole contains nothing which is not to its benefit.
>
> (Marcus Aurelius, *Med*. 10.6)

In Chapter 1, we challenged the Absolutist Evaluative Claim by arguing that sometimes falsehood is preferable to truth, namely, when a false ethical explanation produces true ethical commitments better than a true ethical explanation would. In this chapter we corroborate our defense of useful falsehoods by arguing that a similar account is found in the *Laws*. This is most evident in two aspects of the political structure of Magnesia, the city developed in the *Laws*. The first is in the Athenian Stranger's use of preludes. The Stranger maintains that the law should consist of both persuasion and compulsion (4.711b–c, 4.718b–d, and 4.722b). Persuasion can be achieved by prefacing the law with preludes, while compulsion is achieved through punishment. We argue that several of the preludes rely on falsehoods, and thus, like the noble lie, they promote correct action at the cost of true belief. The same is true of the second salient example of useful falsehood, which is the myth-based account of religion presented to the Magnesians.[1]

Nonetheless, in neither the preludes nor religion does the Stranger rely solely on falsehoods. Some of the preludes appear to advance good epistemic reasons for obeying the law, and there is a complex theology advanced in Book 10 that stands in contrast to the religious myths presented elsewhere. Accordingly, we find the Stranger making use of both true and false ethical explanations to motivate correct action. These discrepancies have led to an ongoing debate in the secondary literature regarding whether the persuasion in the *Laws* is "rational" or "non-rational." Our pragmatic reading provides a resolution to this debate:

the Stranger's primary concern is to facilitate true ethical commitments and psychological harmony and, given the diverse intellectual abilities of the citizens, we should expect the promulgation of laws to offer different types of reasons in different contexts—some more epistemically sound than others. After defending our pragmatic interpretation of persuasion, we argue that the account of falsehood in the *Laws* is similar to the account in the *Republic* (cf. Bartels 2017).

2.1 Preludes, Persuasion, and Medicine

The *Laws* centers around a conversation about laws and constitutions between three elderly men: an unnamed Athenian Stranger, a Cretan named Clinias, and a Spartan named Megillus.[2] The discussion begins with the Athenian asking his counterparts about the central purpose of government. Clinias and Megillus, who come from cultures that esteem war and courage, hold that the purpose of government is to win wars (1.625d–626b). The Athenian Stranger finds this too myopic, however.[3] Of course, it is important that a city does well in war, but this should not be its primary focus (1.628a); rather, the aim of government is to develop virtue in its entirety. That is, the government should promote not only courage but also wisdom, moderation, and justice (1.630a; see also 1.631c, 3.688a–b, 4.705a–707d, and 12.963a–965e; and Baima 2019). This leads to a discussion of the importance of citizens developing all of the virtues.

At the end of Book 3, Clinias reveals that the discussion has been especially beneficial because he is one of ten Cretans who have been appointed to construct a legal code for a new city, Magnesia. This raises the issue of what laws and constitutions Magnesia should have. The Athenian is quick to remind his friends that they should not lose sight of the fact that the purpose of government is to produce all of the virtues in its citizens; thus, the laws of Magnesia should aim at this (4.705a–707d). The Athenian proposes that this can be achieved by having a legal code that consists of both persuasion (*peithō*) and compulsion (*bia*) (4.711c, 4.718b–d, and 4.722b).

The Athenian explains what he has in mind by comparing the medical practice of a free doctor with that of a slave doctor (720a–e).[4] The doctors differ in terms of whom they treat and how they treat them. The slave doctor primarily treats slaves and acts like a dictator. He doesn't listen to the particular needs and desires of the patient, nor does he give an account (*logos*) of the treatment or the nature of the disease. Instead, he simply examines the patient and issues a treatment based on his experience as a physician (720b–c). After he prescribes a treatment, he quickly darts off to examine another sick slave (720c).

In contrast, the free doctor primarily treats free people and is attentive to his patient before issuing a prescription:

> The free doctor investigates the origin of the disease, in the light of his study of the natural order, taking the patient himself and his friends into partnership. This allows him both to learn something from those who are sick, and at the same time, to teach the sick person himself, to the best of his ability; and he prescribes no treatment without first getting the patient's consent. Only then, and all the time using his powers of persuasion [*peithous*] to keep the patient cooperative, does he attempt to complete the task of bringing him back to health.
>
> (720d2–e2)

According to the Athenian, the slave doctor uses a single method of compulsion, while the free doctor uses a double method of both persuasion and compulsion (720e). The double method is superior because it is gentler (720e). The Stranger argues that the legislator should apply the double method, like the free doctor (cf. *Plt*. 293a–c). Thus, the lawgiver should not simply issue commands and threaten the citizens like a dictator. Rather, the legislator should discuss and persuade citizens that it is in their best interest to follow the laws. It is only when persuasion fails that the lawgiver should force the citizens into compliance.

Legislators can achieve persuasion by prefacing the laws with preludes (*prooimia*). Preludes in musical compositions are "artistically designed to aid the coming performance" by providing "a sort of limbering up, so to speak" (722d4–6). That is, they introduce audience members to the forthcoming musical composition in a way that makes the performance better received. Likewise, preludes in the law make the citizens more cooperative and "more ready to learn," and thus more willing to accept the laws freely (723a4–5). In turn, the lawgivers will not have to rely as heavily on violent force to get citizens to comply with the law; thus, this double method is gentler. A gentler method is preferable because it is more likely to produce social cohesion and well-being in the city.[5] By seeing the law to be in their own interest, the citizens will be more inclined to obey it and will be generally more cooperative—even when no one is looking.

The Athenian explains the difference between the single method and the double method by demonstrating how both could apply to marriage laws. The single method simply issues the command that all males are to marry between the ages of 30 and 35. If a male fails to do this, he will be fined and dishonored (721b). The double method includes a similar threat, but unlike the single method, the threat is preceded by a prelude which states:

> He is to marry between the ages of 30 and 35, in the awareness that this is nature's way of giving mankind a taste of immortality—a thing

> for which everybody has a natural and all-consuming longing. After all, becoming famous, avoiding a nameless grave after one's death, is a longing for something of this kind. Hence mankind is in some sense twinned with eternity: the two are forever in step, and they always will be. And what makes the human race immortal is the way it leaves behind children, and their children, as successors, while itself always remaining one and the same. It is through the birth of children that mankind tastes immortality. For someone deliberately to cut himself off from this is always an unholy thing to do, and the person who shows no interest in a wife or family does cut himself off, voluntarily. (721b6–c8)

The Athenian is attempting to teach Megillus and Clinias five lessons about legislating. First, the free doctor differs from the slave doctor to the extent that the free doctor attempts to understand the condition of the patient fully before prescribing a treatment. This involves communing with the patient and seeking to understand the nature of the disease. In contrast, the slave doctor merely issues a prescription based on his previous experience as a doctor. The lesson is that, just as the doctor's treatments will be more effective if he understands his patients and utilizes this understanding when prescribing medicine, so the lawgiver's commands will be more effective if he understands his citizens and utilizes this understanding when prescribing law.

Second, the free doctor doesn't rush from one patient to another as the slave doctor does. Rather, he remains with the patient until he can best treat her. Likewise, the legislator should not rush in creating laws but should take his time and carefully consider the details of the law.

Third, the free doctor applies both persuasion and compulsion, while the slave doctor applies only force. Thus, the legislator should apply both persuasion and compulsion rather than applying only a single method. In other words, the legislator should avoid issuing commands like a slave doctor who simply says, "Take this!" or "Do this!" Instead, just as the free doctor must attempt to persuade the patient of the benefits of a medical treatment, the legislator must attempt to persuade the citizens of the benefits of a law.

Fourth, the slave doctor's method is shorter or briefer to the extent that it involves only force. In contrast, the free doctor's method is longer because it involves both persuasion and compulsion. The Athenian's point is that, when it comes to legislating, what matters isn't the length of the law but whether the law is effective at producing virtue and well-being in the city (see 721e–722b).[6]

Fifth, the free doctor bases his prescriptions on systematic understanding of disease and medicine, while the slave doctor bases it on experience. Thus, the laws must be grounded in a systematic account and not merely based on what has been useful in the past.

2.2 Scholarly Impasse

Scholars disagree over how exactly the preludes persuade. Broadly speaking, there are two main interpretations. The "rational interpretation" argues that the preludes function as a quasi-philosophical argument. As Christopher Bobonich (2002, 104) explains, "The preludes are thus designed to be instances of rational persuasion, that is, attempts to influence the citizens' beliefs by appealing to rational considerations. They are not intended to inculcate false, but useful beliefs, or to effect persuasion through non-rational means." Hence, according to Bobonich, through the preludes "the citizens will learn why the laws are fine and just and should also learn why following the laws, and more generally, acting virtuously is good for them" (2002, 104).[7] In contrast, the "non-rational interpretation" holds that the persuasion doesn't resemble philosophical arguments, but rather appeals to emotions as a means of developing sound affective dispositions and true beliefs in the citizens.[8] R. F. Stalley explains:

> [T]here is no requirement that the preludes offer a rational justification for the laws in the sense of giving them a thorough philosophical grounding. Rather the legislator must seek by any possible means to create a condition of the soul in which the feelings and appetites harmonize with right opinion.
>
> (1994, 167)[9]

The rational interpretation does a better job of capturing the doctor analogy. This is because one of the key differences between the free doctor and the slave doctor seems to be that the free doctor tries to persuade the patient that certain treatments are required by offering reasons. Indeed, in Book 9, the Athenian compares the method of the free doctor to that of a philosopher:

> It wasn't such a bad comparison, when we likened all the people who have laws drawn up for them these days to slaves receiving medical treatment from slaves. Let's be clear about this. If one of those doctors whose attempt at medicine is based on trial and error, with no rational foundation, were ever to come across a free doctor in consultation with his free patient, using rational, almost philosophical, arguments to get a firm grip on the disease from its origins, and then go further back into the whole nature of bodies in general, his first reaction would be a shout of laughter; and what he would have to say would be precisely what most so-called doctors are only too prepared to say on these occasions: "You idiot! You are not doctoring your patient; you are practically educating him, as if what he wanted was to become a doctor, rather than healthy."
>
> (857c4–e1; see Bobonich 2002, 100–101)

Further support for this reading occurs in Book 10 when the Athenian discusses the rational theology of Magnesia. The context for this philosophical account of theology is that the Athenian wants everyone in the city to follow the religion of Magnesia, and he feels that he must offer a response to those who reject his account of religion. In the voice of an imaginary atheist, the Athenian says:

> Some of us don't believe in the gods at all, others believe that they are as you describe. We claim for ourselves the same entitlement that you claimed for your laws, namely that before uttering dire threats you should try first to persuade us, to teach us, by means of convincing evidence, that there *are* gods, that they are above the lure of gifts, and that they will not turn aside from the path of justice … So when we come upon lawgivers who claim to prefer the velvet glove to the mailed fist, we are entitled to expect that your first resort, in dealing with us, will be to persuasion—not much better, perhaps, than what others have to say about the existence of the gods, but at least better in terms of its truth. Who knows, we might even believe you.
>
> (885c5–e5; see also 10.888a–891a; Samaras 2002, 315)

The rest of Book 10 consists of the Athenian trying to prove that the gods exist, care about humans, and can't be persuaded by them. The fact that the imaginary atheist wants to be persuaded through argumentation, and that the Athenian actually offers arguments, lends credence to thinking that the persuasion in the *Laws* is rational.

Nonetheless, this textual support far from settles things for three reasons. First, the examples of doctors and lawmakers are not perfectly analogous. Unpersuaded citizens must still obey the law, but unpersuaded free patients don't have to accept the prescription of free doctors (Stalley 1994, 170). And, unlike the case of the free doctor treating free patients, the citizens are not engaged in personal conversations with the lawgiver (see Nightingale 1993, 287; 1999, 118–119; and Annas 2017, 93).

Second, the Athenian links the preludes to musical education, even though it doesn't provide philosophical understanding. This suggests that the preludes don't provide such understanding. The Greek word for law, *nomos*, also refers to a type of musical composition (3.700b). The Athenian plays off this double entendre when introducing the preludes (4.722c–d and 5.734e). Just as in Books 2 and 3 of the *Republic* (see esp. 3.401d–402a), musical education is fundamentally about teaching people *that* something is fine and good before they are capable of knowing *why* it is so. This largely takes the form of training their affective states:

> When we are children, the first sensations we experience are pleasure and pain, and it is in our pleasures and pains that virtue and vice first develop in our souls. By the time we are old, we are lucky if we

> have also developed wisdom [*phronēsin*] and stable true opinions, for these goods and all that they involve complete a person, but it is the virtue that first develops in children that I am calling education. If pleasure and liking and pain and hatred develop correctly in our souls when we are not yet able to grasp the account [*logon*], and when we do grasp the account they agree with it because they have been correctly trained by appropriate habits, this agreement is virtue in its entirety. But the part of virtue that consists in having properly nurtured pleasures and pains, so that we hate what we should hate and love what we should love from beginning to end, if you separated this off in your account and called it education, you would be exactly right, in my view.
>
> (2.653a5–c4; see Bury 1937; Frede 2010, 120–126; Kamtekar 2010b)

Third, most of the preludes seem to encourage citizens to obey the law by engaging their emotions and desires. For instance, the prelude to the marriage law encourages citizens by playing off their desire for glory and immortality (4.721b–c). This is not to say that philosophical reasons don't underlie this prelude (see *Symp*. 207c–209e; Rowe 2010, 48–40; and Arist. *Gen. an*. 2.1.731b18–732a12); rather, the point is that these reasons are not explained—nor could they explain the particular details of this prelude (see Stalley 1994, 170; Annas 2017, 95). For instance, we have no reason to suspect that the Athenian doesn't believe that, in general, these are the optimal ages to marry in a city like Magnesia (cf. 6.772d–e; see also Xen. *Lac*. 1.6). However, worries about sexual promiscuity and the population—though not mentioned in this prelude—also seem to motivate this specific law.[10]

Consider also the prelude involving temple robbery:

> Wretch! It is not human, still less divine, this evil impulse which drives you to go robbing temples. No, it is a madness implanted in you which has its origins in crimes committed long ago and never expiated by humans; as it whirls around in its destructive course, we should guard against it with all our strength. And how do we guard against it? Hear now. When you feel a resolve of this nature coming over you, go straight to the exorcists and their rites; go straight to the shrines of the gods who avert evil, as their suppliant; go straight to the company of those who have the reputation among you of being good men. Hear what they say, and try repeating to yourself, that it is the duty of every man to respect what is fine and what is just. As for the company of the wicked, leave it, without a backward glance—but if not, then regard death as a finer choice, and say your farewell to life.
>
> (9.854b1–c5)

This prelude appeals to one's sense of honor through mythical imagery, thereby encouraging one to obey the law.[11]

Despite their differences, both interpretations agree that the preludes don't involve useful falsehoods. It is clear why the rational interpretation would reject this position, but it is somewhat surprising that the non-rational interpretation rejects this since it seems like a natural bedfellow. Historically, defenders of the non-rational interpretation have distanced themselves from the idea that Plato utilizes falsehoods in reaction to Popper (1966, Chap. 8) attributing questionable ethical and political views to Plato.[12] Thus, the disagreement between the interpretations is mostly about the way the truth is imparted and the resultant epistemic state. The rational interpretation maintains that truth is conveyed through argumentation and aims at producing knowledge or something close to it, while the non-rational interpretation holds that truth is conveyed by developing the right affective states and results in true belief.[13] In what follows, we will argue that both readings fail to appreciate the role of useful falsehoods in Magnesia. Our broader point, however, is that the fundamental purpose of the preludes is practical—they are meant to inculcate true ethical commitments. The preludes take varied forms because of the varied psychology of the citizen body.

2.3 On the Weakness of Moral Motivation

In Book 2, the Athenian asks whether injustice causes unhappiness (661e1–4; see also *Grg*. 474c–475e; Baima 2018, 359–363), to which Clinias (who is speaking for both himself and Megillus) responds, "No" (661e5). The Athenian adjusts his strategy by asking whether injustice causes one to live shamefully (662a2–3), and Clinias concedes that it does (662a4). Now that the Athenian has Clinias' agreement that the unjust life is shameful, he asks if this life causes one to live badly (662a5). Clinias answers in the negative (662a6). The Athenian follows up by asking if this life causes one to live unpleasantly and not beneficially (662a7). Clinias responds, "How could we possibly concede this further point?" (662a8). Clinias' position isn't unreasonable: if he isn't going to concede that the unjust life causes one to live badly, why would he concede that it causes one to live unpleasantly and not beneficially?

The Athenian replies:

> How indeed, my friends? We are so badly out of tune with one another that it would take a god to bring us into agreement! As far as I'm concerned, my dear Clinias, these things appear so necessary that not even "Crete is an island" is as obvious. If I were a lawmaker, I would do my best to compel the poets, and everyone in the city, to abide by these doctrines in their utterances. I would mete out virtually the highest penalty to anyone in the land who spread word that

> there are wicked people who live pleasantly, or that while some things are beneficial and profitable, others are more just. I would persuade the citizens to proclaim the opposite of what it seems Cretans and Spartans are saying these days, and no doubt other peoples as well.
>
> (662b1–c5)

The Athenian offers four arguments for why the lawgivers need to teach the citizens that the most just life is the happiest and the pleasantest.[14] First, if the most just life isn't the pleasantest, then the lawgiver faces a dilemma concerning the connection between justice and happiness:

1. First Prong: If the lawgiver concedes that the most just life isn't the happiest life, then she is being inconsistent by claiming to have the citizen's best interest in mind while urging them to practice justice and to obey the laws. (662e, see also 1.631b)
2. Second Prong: If the lawgiver maintains that the most just life is still the happiest (but not the pleasantest), then she must explain how the most just life is happier than any unjust alternative without also being more pleasant. (662d–e)

With respect to the second prong, the Athenian is doubtful that it is possible to articulate a way in which the most just life is happier than any unjust alternative without also being more pleasant. The problem is that the goods that relate to justice have a close connection with pleasure: the just will be admired and live in a society where they won't be wronged, and because these aspects seem pleasant, it is difficult to identify a good separate from pleasure that the just life has over the unjust life (663a). Since the second prong isn't viable, the lawgiver must accept either the first prong, in which case her view is inconsistent with her message, or she must accept that pleasure, happiness, and justice are connected. Call this the "inconsistency argument."

The second argument is that by teaching the citizens that justice is connected to what is good, admirable, and pleasant, the lawgiver can motivate the citizens to obey the law voluntarily (663b). The Athenian continues,

> So, as far as the legislator is concerned, the most shameful view, and the most diametrically opposed to his own, is the one which denies that this is how things are. After all, nobody would voluntarily agree to do something unless the enjoyment resulting from it is greater than the pain.
>
> (663b2–6)

Call this the "motivation argument."

The third argument appeals to the authority of the judgments of just people. Just as the appearances of objects change at different distances,

one's ethical perspective will also alter how an object appears to one (663b–c). Unjust and just people will view justice and its respective goods differently. The just will find justice to be pleasant, whereas the unjust will not (663c). Since the just soul is better than the unjust soul, the judgments of the just person are more authoritative, and thus "it is necessary that the unjust life isn't only more shameful and more wretched, but also in truth more unpleasant than the just and pious life" (663d2–4). Clinias responds, "So it would seem, friends, at least as far as the present argument goes" (663d5). Call this the "authority argument."

Before we examine the fourth argument, it is important to note two things about the first three arguments. First, these arguments are very limited in what they can actually establish. The inconsistency argument and the motivation argument are entirely practical in nature and can't confirm any actual connection between justice, happiness, and pleasure. If the lawgiver were to start teaching that the most just life isn't the happiest life, his teaching would be inconsistent and that might be a sufficient reason for him to not promulgate this claim, but this reason has nothing to do with the truth. Likewise, the motivation argument never purports to achieve anything other than to encourage justice.

Second, these arguments demonstrate that justice divorced from pleasure is a weak motivation. The motivation argument holds that it is difficult to get citizens to practice justice voluntarily unless they view it as pleasurable. The authority argument connects to this point by presenting a hurdle that the lawgiver faces. According to the authority argument, if one views unjust acts as being pleasant, then one isn't fully just. Given that pleasure is such a strong motivation, this means that the unjust will be inclined to act unjustly. It can be very difficult to persuade such people about the personal merits of justice since they must simply trust the authority of the just person that these acts are actually pleasant.

The point above hearkens back to one of the main lessons of Book 2: virtue involves a harmony between one's evaluative judgments and feelings. If one doesn't have the appropriate evaluative judgments and feelings, one will not be virtuous even if one can intellectually grasp the right action. Clinias and Megillus reject the Stranger's argument not because they find that it lacks intellectual rigor—it is far more rigorous than anything they could come up with—they reject it because the argument doesn't sit right with them emotionally. Had they received the appropriate early childhood education, the argument would harmonize with their feelings. This is why the Athenian remarks that they are out of tune with each other and require a god to harmonize them (662b1–2). With this background in place, let us turn to the fourth argument.

After putting forth the authority argument, the Athenian asserts that even if justice and pleasure are not linked together, citizens should still be taught that they are:

> ATH.: But just suppose that the truth had been different from what the argument has now shown it to be and that a lawgiver, even a mediocre one, had been sufficiently bold in the interests of the young to tell them a lie [*pseudesthai*]. Could he have told a more useful lie [*pseudos*] than this, or one more effective in making everyone practice justice in everything he or she does voluntarily and without pressure? (663d6–e2)
>
> CL.: Truth is a fine thing, and it is enduring, but to persuade one of it certainly seems no easy task. (663e3–4; see England 1921, *ad loc.*)
>
> ATH.: That may be so, but wasn't it easy to convince people about the myth about the Sidonian, despite it being incredible, and countless other tales? (663e5–6)
>
> CL.: What sort of stories? (663e7)
>
> ATH.: The sowing of the teeth and the birth of armed men from them. This notable example shows the legislator that the souls of the young can be persuaded of anything; he has only to try. The only thing he must consider and discover is what conviction would do the state most good. In that connection, he must think up every possible device to ensure that, as far as possible, the entire community preserves in its songs, stories, and doctrines an absolute and lifelong unanimity. But if you see the matter in any other light, have no hesitation in disputing my view. (663e8–664a8)

Although the Stranger ultimately thinks it is true that the most just life is the pleasantest life (664b–c), if this were not the case, he would lie because this falsehood would motivate the citizens to act justly. Call this the "falsehood argument."

The falsehood argument demonstrates three things. First, Plato is clearly drawing our attention back to the noble lie of the *Republic*. When introducing the noble lie, Socrates references a Phoenician story and discusses how the Kallipolians were born from the land (3.414c–d), and in *Laws* 663e–664a, the Athenian references the sowing of dragon's teeth in the earth. In both passages, Plato is referencing the mythical foundation of Thebes. Allegedly, the Phoenician Prince Cadmus planted dragon's teeth in the ground from which men spawned and fought each other. The surviving men helped Cadmus found Thebes (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.4.1). In addition to both texts using the same myth as an example of a useful falsehood, the general account of education is quite similar. In both the *Republic* (see especially 3.401d–402a) and the *Laws*, early childhood education, of which myth is a central part, is meant to teach citizens *that*

something is fine and good (and ugly and bad) before they can understand the reason *why*. Early childhood education does this by training citizens' affective dispositions. This suggests that Plato is thinking of mythology similarly in the *Laws* and the *Republic* (see Schofield 2007, 160–162; Plato 2016, 83n30).

Second, the Stranger endorses the lawgiver's lying when telling the truth is harmful and insufficient to motivate just actions.

Third, the Stranger thinks that morality is a weak source of motivation for the majority of citizens. The Athenian is worried that, if it were true that justice and pleasure were not connected, and the citizens were taught this truth, then they would choose pleasure over justice. The Athenian, thus, takes the majority of people to be more motivated by pleasure than by justice. Why exactly does the Athenian think justice is a weaker motivator than pleasure? The thought seems to be that most citizens are motivated by consideration of their own good, and pleasure is the state that they most closely associate with their own good. If pleasure doesn't accompany just actions, then it will appear to citizens that justice is purely other-regarding, and hence that pursuit of it isn't ultimately reasonable.

Three passages support this reading. In Book 9, the Athenian argues that there are three main obstacles to political success. The first obstacle is that most people fail to grasp intellectually that the goal of politics is to do what is best for the common good and not what is in their private interest (875a–b). The second obstacle is that most people don't understand that often the best way of promoting their own private interest is to promote the good of the state (875a–b). The third obstacle is less intellectual and more affective. The Athenian explains that, even if people had the correct intellectual grasp of the goal of politics, most individuals would still fail to act in accordance with this goal because their selfish mortal nature would drive them to pursue their own pleasure over that of the city (875b–c).

We find a similar worry conveyed in Book 5 where the Athenian argues that the cause of every failure is excessive self-love (731e). The Athenian explains that love is blinding: when individuals are in love, they can't see the object of their love as it actually is; rather, their vision of this object is skewed (731e). The problem with excessive self-love is that the object of love is oneself; thus, individuals become trapped in a vicious circle of self-deception, which blinds them to what is truly just and beneficial. Consequently, when they act in a way that they perceive to be just and in their interest, they are quite mistaken and are actually acting in an unjust and harmful manner (732a–b).

In the third key passage, the Athenian offers a myth to help console potential deists after he has argued against deism (10903a–b). The deist accepts that there are gods, but he doesn't think that the gods are concerned with human affairs since they would be insignificant and small to a divine being. Through the myth, the Athenian explains that the gods

have arranged the parts with an eye towards the Whole, and that the Whole doesn't exist for the sake of the part, but the part for the Whole. Here lies the deist's error and source of frustration:

> And it is precisely here that you miss the point, not realizing that what comes into being, all of it, comes into being for the sake of that Whole, to bring about, for the life of the Whole, the blessed existence it actually has. That existence does not come into being for your sake—rather you for its sake … The reason you get upset is because you don't realize that what is best in your case is what is good for the Whole and for you, such is the power of that which brought you both into being.
>
> (10.903c2–d3)[15]

The deist is frustrated because he lacks the proper perspective: he is not only too self-centered but also blind to the ways in which his good and the good of the Whole are entwined.

These examples point to two general claims that the Athenian holds of most individuals:

A. Most individuals are primarily motivated to act for reasons that they perceive to be self-regarding.
B. Most individuals fail to recognize that they often have self-regarding reasons to act for the good of others.

Because most citizens think in this way, they are not going to be motivated by reasons that they perceive to be purely other-regarding. Therefore, in order to persuade the citizens to act rightly, the lawgiver needs to find a way to direct people's selfish nature towards justice. The lawgiver can do this by having preludes attached to the laws that highlight the ways in which justice coheres with self-interest—and if necessary, these preludes will deviate from the truth.

Hence, the reason the Athenian is willing to lie about the connection between pleasure and justice is that justice alone is a weak incentive for most citizens. Justice is such a weak motivator that, even if citizens were taught that it is in their interest to be just, the lawgiver must provide additional incentives to motivate them to act correctly. For example, in Book 11, the Athenian explains that robbery is actually counterproductive because no monetary gain is worth as much as having a virtuous soul and stealing corrupts one's soul; thus, one is better off not stealing (913b). Following this, the Athenian says that citizens should believe the myth that robbery harms fertility (913c). Now why does the Athenian add the myth? Why is it not enough to tell citizens that acting unjustly is bad for their soul? First, most individuals are not going to believe that acting unjustly is bad for them because it harms their soul. The complex

and abstract nature of soul-harm—along with our propensity towards self-deception—can make it difficult to recognize that having a bad soul results in self-harm. Second, even if citizens do recognize the gravity of soul-harm, the temptation for material possessions can be overpowering. This is because the pleasures associated with material goods are simpler and more tangible. Thus, by telling citizens a fanciful story about how theft harms fertility, the idea that injustice harms and that justice benefits becomes more tangible and thus more efficacious at promoting justice and discouraging injustice. It is obvious that this is the intention of the Athenian because after saying that the citizens should be told this myth he considers what to tell those who are indifferent to having children (913c). Hence, the Athenian is clearly trying to locate something that will motivate citizens to behave rightly (Clark 2003, 130–135; T. Pangle 1988, 448; Stalley 1994, 170–172; cf. Schofield 2006, 319–321).

2.4 Religion for the Unsophisticated

In the previous section, we argued that Plato is willing to provide false ethical explanations as a means of counteracting people's inclination towards selfishness. However, there is another reason why he is willing to tell falsehoods to citizens: some subject matters are beyond the grasp of certain individuals, and it is dangerous to try to explain the truth of such subjects to these individuals. This is most evident in how the Stranger handles theological matters in the city. In what follows, we shall argue that there are two different accounts of religion presented in the *Laws*. On the one hand, there are traditional religious myths told to unphilosophical citizens. These stories incentivize virtuous behavior and disincentivize vicious behavior. On the other hand, there are abstract theological issues, which are to be explored only by philosophers (see Dodds 1951, 220).

The more traditional or mythical religious views are often conveyed in the preludes that accompany the laws (see Morrow 1960, 401). Consider a brief sampling; the Athenian wants citizens to believe that

1. The ghosts of free individuals who are involuntarily killed haunt their killer when the killer frequents the ghost's former surroundings. (9.865d–e)
2. Those who commit voluntary homicide are punished in Hades, and those who return to Earth suffer the same fate as their victims. (9.870d–e)
3. Those who voluntarily kill their relatives will suffer the same fate as their victims. For instance, if a man kills his father, he will be murdered by his son. If a man kills his mother, he will be reborn as a woman and killed by her son. (9.872d–873a)
4. Robbing will lead to infertility. (11.913c)

5. The Demoness of the Road guards and protects things left by other people. (11.914b)
6. The dead parents of orphans are hostile towards those who mistreat their children and love those who treat them well. (11.927a–b)
7. The gods are more responsive to the prayers of those who honor their parents and more likely to punish those who do not. (11.931b–932a)

These stories serve three purposes. First, they disincentivize serious misconduct by making citizens fear the haunting vengeance of Justice. Second, they reassure the injured party by telling them that the perpetrator will suffer (see Saunders 1991, 196). Third, they convey a teleological theology in which the gods and divine beings act in an orderly and systematic way, are just, and are invested in the lives of humans (see 10.885b and 10.902e–905d). Accordingly, these religious myths operate as noble lies: they give citizens false beliefs about *why* they should obey the law in order to motivate the true belief *that* they should obey the law.[16]

However, it is unlikely that Plato actually believes the details of these stories. Note first that these myths evoke the imagery of traditional myths, the truth of which Plato denies in other works. For example, in the *Euthyphro*, Socrates tells Euthyphro that he is likely being prosecuted because he finds the traditional stories of the gods difficult to accept (6a–b). Additionally, consider that in Book 2 of the *Republic* Socrates asserts that the myths are "false, taken as a whole, but also have truth in them" (377a4–5). With this in mind, consider Plato's evaluation of the myth of Phaethon in the *Timaeus* (22c–d). In the myth, Phaethon, the son of Helios (the sun god), arrogantly rides his father's sun-chariot and sets the heavens and earth ablaze. Speaking about this myth, Plato says, "This tale is told as a myth, but the truth behind it is that there is a deviation in the heavenly bodies that travel around the earth, which causes huge fires that destroy what is on earth across vast stretches of time" (22c6–d3).[17] Hence, the myth is a personification of real astronomical events; nevertheless, many people who hear this story will take the fictional aspect as true and fail to grasp the real astronomical lessons behind it. Likewise, Plato might believe that some aspects of the religious myths in the *Laws* are true, such as that the gods are teleological and just, and that the citizens should obey the laws. Nonetheless, it is doubtful that Plato actually believes the fantastic aspects of the myths in the *Laws*, such as that those who are murdered track and haunt their killers as ghosts (9.865d–e).

There is evidence that the Athenian is thinking of the myths in much the same way in the *Laws*. Book 10 is largely a defense of the theological views of the city and the dangers of not conforming to the city's religion. The Athenian is concerned that atheists, deists, and misguided theists (who think that the gods can be bribed) are a great threat to society. For instance, at 885b4–6 the Athenian asserts that "no one who believes in gods according to the laws has ever voluntarily done an impious deed or let slip an

illegal utterance" (θεοὺς ἡγούμενος εἶναι κατὰ νόμους οὐδεὶς πώποτε οὔτε ἔργον ἀσεβὲς ἠργάσατο ἑκὼν οὔτε λόγον ἀφῆκεν ἄνομον). As for the religious deviants, the Athenian complains that things would be better if they

> believed the stories which they had as babes and sucklings from their nurses and mothers! These almost literally "charming" stories were told partly for amusement, partly in full earnest; the children heard them related in prayer at sacrifices, and saw acted representations of them—a part of the ceremony a child always loves to see and hear; and they saw their own parents praying with the utmost seriousness for themselves and their families in the firm conviction that their prayers and supplications were addressed to gods who really did exist … far from supposing gods to be a myth, the worshippers believed their existence to be so sure as to be beyond suspicion.
>
> (887d2–e7)

From this, we can construct the following argument:

1. Plato believes that the myths told to children are on the whole false but can convey some truth.
2. The citizens of Magnesia will be told myths about the gods as children, which are to be believed in earnest all the way through adulthood.
3. Therefore, the citizens of Magnesia will be told falsehoods about the gods, which are to be believed in earnest all the way through adulthood.

Before we discuss the significance of these religious myths, we would like to address a potential objection. Both T. J. Saunders and Bobonich downplay the significance of these passages. For instance, Saunders says,

> Most of the preambles are positive in content and spirit; the savage ones are to be deployed only where education and persuasion have proved ineffective. At this point Plato throws anything and everything at the potential criminal's head, however crude and primitive, regardless of inconsistency with his official penology.
>
> (1991, 210–211)

Similarly, Bobonich says,

> Such stories are designed for those who have failed to benefit from the education given to all and are the next resort when persuasion and education have failed. They are followed by the last resort, which is the statement of the penalty attached to violation of the law.
>
> (2002, 113–114; see also Bobonich 1991, 381; *Laws* 9.871a–c)

However, Saunders and Bobonich misrepresent how these preludes work. It is not as if the preludes are told to reckless individuals just about to commit a crime. Rather, they are built into the educational system; thus, all citizens will be taught these myths. Moreover, the Athenian makes it clear that these are not new myths but are already traditional stories held by many people and that he wants citizens to believe these stories earnestly (887d–e).

Why does Plato want to tell citizens false theological stories? Why not teach the truth instead? The answer is that the truth about these matters is too complex and abstract for the average citizen to understand. Hence, these abstract truths will not be able to motivate citizens and might even lead them to act worse (see Dodds 1951, 223–224). Consider the Athenian's discussion of education in astronomy and mathematics in Book 7. Education in these subjects produces knowledge of the "divine" or "natural" necessities that govern the cosmos (818c–d). Because of the difficult nature of the subject matter, only a select few will study these subjects in depth (818a).[18] The majority of people will study these complex subjects only as far as it is practically necessary for properly organizing and conducting a household. During this discussion, Clinias suspects that his and Megillus' lack of familiarity with such important subjects frightens the Athenian. The Stranger responds that, indeed, this is a concern; however, what frightens him even more is when people study such divine subjects in a bad way—this is far worse than blanket ignorance (819a).

The Athenian's anxiety becomes more pronounced in Book 10 when he attempts to convince an imaginary young atheist that the gods exist. At the beginning of the discussion, Clinias wonders why they cannot simply point out to the Atheist that (a) the earth, sun, stars, and universe have order and (b) all Greeks and barbarians believe in the existence of gods (886a). Clinias' simple argument reveals his naïvety: he mistakenly attributes the cause of atheism solely to an uncontrollable lust for pleasure (886a–b). The Athenian explains that atheism is often caused by ideas put forth by modern astronomers who argue that the planets are soulless rocks, devoid of reason, and thus incapable of caring about the affairs of humans (886c–d).

The Athenian continues this idea in Book 12, when he attributes atheism to amateurish and lowly studies of astronomy (966e–967d; see also *Ap*. 18a–c). The Athenian argues that, if such individuals had a better understanding of astronomy and the nature of the soul, then they wouldn't view the planets as soulless beings moving chaotically without reason. Rather, they would understand that the planets have souls and move with reason (see T. Pangle 1988, 494 and Mayhew 2010, 213–214).

Here we find three different positions: the ignorant (Megillus and Clinias), the amateur astronomer (the Atheist), and the real astronomer (the Athenian). Both the ignorant and the real astronomer believe in the

existence of gods, while the amateur astronomer doesn't. Now, to the extent that atheism is a threat to society, the real worry isn't ignorance but receiving an improper education. An improper education occurs when one studies things that one is unqualified to study (see *Resp*. 6.491d–e and 7.518e–519a). One is not only likely to draw the wrong conclusion but also to be more recalcitrant, thereby making one less likely to accept important civic truths (see *Resp*. 7.517a). This is why the Athenian tells the imaginary young Atheist to wait until he is older to make up his mind on theological issues. In the meantime, he should listen most of all to what the lawgiver has to say about such things and not risk impiety (10.888a–d).

Hence, Plato believes that one's theological education should be in proportion to one's philosophical abilities (see 12.968d–e). Those with robust philosophical skills (or the capacity for such skills) will study the more advanced theological views discussed in Book 10 and Book 12. In contrast, those who lack philosophical skills (or the capacity for such skills) will merely be taught traditional myths, which contain falsehood and only present a shadow of the truth.

Support for this interpretation is found in Book 12. After arguing that amateurish astronomy causes atheism, the Athenian asserts that in order to be an adequate ruler one must grasp that the soul is the eldest of all things and that the stars have intelligence (966d–e). Additionally, one should learn the necessary subjects (namely, math and astronomy, 7.817e–822d) that precede these matters (967d–e), and one "must observe those elements of music and poetry which have some connection with them, applying them harmoniously to the practices and institutions of ethics" (967e2–4; see also 2.653a–671a, 7.802a–804b, and 7.812b–813a).

This passage suggests three things. First, the set of things that concern music and poetry is distinct from the set of theological truths discovered through the divine sciences (see 6.783a). Second, at some points both sets overlap. Third, the ruler should apply his understanding of what is in common between both sets in a way that produces sound dispositions in the citizens. This supports the claims that some citizens learn only a portion of the theological truths that are known, and that these truths that these citizens learn is mainly a function of what will help produce sound dispositions.

However, this doesn't suggest the further point that the reason why some citizens are taught only a portion of theological truths is that it is dangerous to attempt to teach them more advanced truths. But support for this further idea is found in Book 10. Before the Athenian embarks on a sophisticated philosophical discussion of the soul, he issues a warning to Megillus and Clinias:

> Suppose we three had to cross a rapidly flowing river, and I, who happened to be the youngest of us and experienced with many currents, said, "I ought to try first on my own account and leave you

> two in safety while I see if the river is fordable for you two older men as well, or if not, just how bad it is. If it turns out to be fordable, I'll then call you and put my experience at your disposal in helping you to cross; but, if in the event it can't be crossed by old men like yourselves, then the only risk has been mine." … The situation is the same now: the argument ahead runs too deep, and men as weak as you will probably get out of your depth. I want to prevent you novices in answering from being dazed and dizzied by a stream of questions, which would put you in an undignified and humiliating position you'd find most unpleasant.
>
> (892d6–893a2; see Mayhew 2008, 104–105; 2010, 214–215)

The Athenian's worry isn't simply that Megillus and Clinias will fail to understand the subsequent discussion about the soul. His concern, instead, is that in their attempt to understand they will drown in confusion. Because of this concern, the Athenian, who has a background in philosophy, will guide the discussion and will help his weaker friends ford this philosophical river. The larger point of this metaphor is that it is dangerous for those lacking philosophical skill to investigate such complicated topics alone—they need a guide to filter the truth in a way that they can grasp.

This raises the question of why the Athenian offers arguments to the imaginary atheist in Book 10 rather than attempting to persuade him through non-rational means. The imaginary atheist has two distinct features that make rational persuasion necessary. First, because the Atheist is convinced that gods don't exist, he isn't going to be motivated by preludes that appeal to divine punishment or reward.[19] Second, the Atheist's belief that gods don't exist is partly due to his having been exposed to cosmological arguments against theism (10.886c–e; see also 7.818c–819a and12.966e–967d). Therefore, if the Athenian is to stand a chance at persuading the Atheist that gods exist, he first has to demonstrate that the Atheist's view of cosmology is mistaken. And this is precisely what the Athenian sets out to do when he offers arguments about the nature of the soul and the cosmos. In other words, the Athenian's use of rational arguments in Book 10 should be viewed as a last-ditch effort to get the Atheist's compliance without force. The Athenian is adamant that it would be far better had the Atheist unreflectively believed the myths about the gods that he was taught as a child (887d–e). The rational persuasion in Book 10, hence, is not a generic feature of the persuasion that Plato has in mind in the *Laws* but is a special device used in cases where more traditional stories would prove ineffective (see *Tht.* 177a).

This corroborates the central claims that we put forth in Chapter 1: Plato endorses the utilization of false ethical explanations for the sake of developing true ethical commitments. It is sometimes not only more effective to persuade citizens to pursue virtue and obey the law through

falsehood but also less dangerous. We do see, however, that Plato doesn't rely solely on myth and preaching. There are certain issues for which some people can be persuaded only through argumentation and hence must be offered philosophical reasons for adopting certain beliefs. Seen in this light, the fundamental purpose of the preludes is to develop sound ethical dispositions and to promote correct action—given the varied citizen body, we can expect a varied approach to persuading them.[20] Thus, neither the rational interpretation nor the non-rational interpretation is entirely right. Plato is willing to do whatever it takes to develop a love of virtue and a hatred of vice in citizens; this, of course, requires some truth, but it can also require some falsehood. As the Stranger instructs,

> We may take action or simply talk to the criminal; we may grant him pleasures or make him suffer; we may honor him or disgrace him; we may fine him or give him gifts. We may use absolutely *any* means to make him hate injustice and embrace the nature of justice—or at any rate not hate it.
>
> (9.862d4–8; see L. Pangle 2014, 221–224; Saunders 1991, 144–145; cf. Stalley 1983, 142–143)

2.5 Ignorance, Vice, and Motivation

Having defended the claim that Plato utilizes falsehood in the *Laws*, it will be valuable to consider whether this conception of falsehood is similar to the conception outlined in Chapter 1. In Chapter 1 we argued that Plato doesn't evaluate all falsehoods equally in the *Republic*. He is rather indifferent to some falsehoods but is deeply disturbed by "genuine falsehoods." We argued that genuine falsehoods are defective cognitive dispositions concerning ethical commitments. Although the term "genuine falsehood" is unique to the *Republic*, a similar idea is expressed in the *Laws*. In Book 3, the Athenian explains that early kingships broke down because of ethical failing and "ignorance concerning the greatest human matters" (τῇ περὶ τὰ μέγιστα τῶν ἀνθρωπίνων πραγμάτων ἀμαθίᾳ) (688c7–d1). The Athenian shows that the greatest sort of ignorance (*amathia*) (689a1) occurs when one

> believes that something is fine and good but hates it instead of loving it, while he loves and welcomes what he believes is wicked and unjust … This discord between pain and pleasure and rational judgment [*logon doxan*] is the most extreme form of ignorance [*amathian*].
>
> (689a5–9; cf. *Prt.* 357e)

The Athenian explains that this is the greatest form of ignorance because it affects the most populated part of the city and soul, and terrible things

happen when the masses oppose the noble ruling elements. In the soul, this occurs when pleasure and pain oppose knowledge (*epistēmē*), belief (*doxa*), or reason (*logos*), while in the city, this occurs when the populace opposes the rulers (689b–d). Indeed, this concord between emotion and reason is the "greatest wisdom [*sophia*]" (689d6–7). Similar to the *Republic* (as discussed in Chapter 1), Plato identifies the greatest wisdom and the greatest ignorance entirely in ethical terms in the *Laws*. Additionally, similar to the *Republic* (as we saw in Chapter 1), in the *Laws*, Plato prioritizes beliefs that directly affect the state of one's soul over beliefs that do not. This is most explicit in Book 9 when the Athenian provides his general description of justice and injustice:

> I can now finally define, clearly and without frills, what I personally mean by the just and the unjust. To the tyranny in the soul exercised by anger, fear, pleasure, pain, envy, and desire—whether they lead to any actual damage [*blaptēi*] or not—I give the general label "injustice." Whereas the belief about what is best, no matter in what way a city or particular individuals may think they can achieve this, if this has the upper hand in their souls and governs every man—even if it is in some way mistaken [*kan sphallētai ti*]—then what is done through this, and the part of each man that becomes obedient to such a rule, must be declared to be just, and best for the whole of human life—even though many are of the belief that such damage [*tēn toiautēn blabēn*] done constitutes involuntary injustice [*akousion adikian*].
>
> (863e5–864a8)

This passage is significant because it identifies justice and injustice with psychological harmony and disharmony, and it says that justice is compatible with being "in some way mistaken" (or "with the occasional lapse" (trans. Griffith in Plato 2016)) (*kan sphallētai ti*) (864a4). This supports the central thesis of Part I. If justice is compatible with some types of falsehood and incompatible with others, and the most important thing is justice, then there is a hierarchy of truth and falsehood. If this is the case, then it would seem that truth isn't always preferable to falsehood since it would make sense to endorse an insignificant falsehood for the sake of producing and sustaining a more significant truth.

Nonetheless, there has been quite a bit of controversy over how to understand *kan sphallētai ti*. Understood quite broadly, there are two interpretations. There are those who deny that *kan sphallētai ti* refers to a mistake and there are those who accept that it does.[21] The deniers interpret the line as something like "even if some damage occurs" (see England 1921; O'Brien 1957, 1967, 190–197; Bury 1926; and A. Taylor 1934). Roslyn Weiss (2006, Chap. 7) offers a thorough defense of the "damage reading," arguing that it has several advantages over the "mistake reading". We will focus on three. First, understanding *kan sphallētai*

ti as damage allows for a clear parallel with the earlier discussion of injustice: just as something can be unjust even if no damage occurs (863e8), something can be just even if some damage does occur (Weiss 2006, 192–193). Second, at 864a7–8 the Athenian refers to "such damage" (*tēn toiautēn blabēn*) and unless *kan sphallētai ti* refers to damage done, *tēn toiautēn blabēn* will have no referent (2006, 193). Third, Weiss says,

> Moreover, in view of the fact that the Athenian just established ignorance as the third cause of [wrongdoings or failures] *hamartēmata* (863c), is it not unreasonable that he would now regard what is done in ignorance, however well ordered the soul that does it, as both just and best for the whole human life?
>
> (2006, 193–194; see also O'Brien 1957)

Weiss' point is that because the Athenian identifies ignorance as a source of wrongdoing just before this passage, it wouldn't make sense for him to exclude it as a source of injustice now (863a–c).

In addition, some scholars find that the mistake reading conflicts with basic Platonic commitments. As Silvia Cunha observes:

> This interpretation seems to conflict with lines 863c1–d4, where the Athenian associates ignorance with more serious and brutal wrongs, and would represent a radical change in Plato's thought. It also sounds incompatible with the passage from Book 10 in which Plato reserves the death penalty to the impious, in spite of acknowledging that some might love justice and be thus sincerely wrong in their beliefs. If the traditional interpretation is correct, the impious who would be acting according to the voice of his conscience, would not have committed any injustice, and thus would not be deserving of any punishment.
>
> (2018, 64–65)

However, these objections are not as strong as they might appear. Before we respond to them, we need to clarify our preferred version of the mistake reading. We hold that justice and injustice refer to the psychological condition of the agent, whether it is harmonious or disharmonious, respectively. By this point in the book, it should come as no surprise that we believe some amount of ignorance is compatible with a harmonious soul, but "some" is the key word. One can't have psychological harmony (or even approximate harmony) if one is wildly mistaken about what the correct ethical commitments are. Furthermore, two features of the passage suggest that the ignorance is minor. First, the implication of *kan sphallētai ti* is that the mistake is minor (see Saunders 1968, 431–432). Second, the Stranger asserts that the belief in the soul that directs one's

life is deemed best for human life, and this only makes sense if the belief largely corresponds to reality (see Saunders 1968, 432; Schofield 2012, 113). Thus, we take the Stranger's point to be that the just person generally has correct beliefs about what is good, and these beliefs guide her life, but the just person might lack perfect knowledge and might make occasional factual mistakes that result in damage.

With our view clarified, we can now address the objections. First, there is an easy solution to *tēn toiautēn blabēn* not having a referent on the mistake reading. We can interpret *kan sphallētai ti* as a mistake that causes some damage (*tēn toiautēn blabēn*). Schofield's translation captures this well: "That is so even if there are mistakes, resulting in the sort of injury people in general take to be involuntary injustice" (2012, 113).

Second, read in this way, there is a parallel between the discussions of injustice and justice since both concern harm. But notice, it wouldn't make sense if justice and injustice were exactly parallel since having a tyrannical soul always involves some sort of error but not all error involves having a tyrannical soul. Hence, it would never make sense to describe injustice as "the tyranny of the soul … even if it is someway mistaken"—a tyrannical soul is always greatly mistaken.

Third, we needn't be concerned that the Athenian marks off ignorance as a cause of wrongdoings or failures (*hamartēmata*) because failure is a broader category than injustice. All injustice involves failure but not all failure involves injustice (see Grote 1888, vol. 4, 367–368; Dodds 1966; cf. Saunders 1968, 434). Indeed, this seems to be part of the Stranger's point in distinguishing the damage done to the victim from the psychological state of the wrongdoer (861e–862d). The perpetrator in some sense failed to act accordingly and needs to repair the harm done, but he needn't be unjust, given that non-blamable mistakes happen (see Roberts 1987, 29). Support for this claim is found in the fact that soon after this passage, the Athenian discusses involuntary homicides—some of which involve accidental deaths, such as accidentally killing an ally on the battlefield while mistaking him for an enemy (864c–865c).[22]

Finally, although it would distract from our present purposes too much to go into great detail, we have two responses to the worry about the justice-loving atheist being put to death. First, punishment in Magnesia has several ends. One is to address the psychology of the wrongdoer, another is to address the psychology of the victim and community, and another is to repair the harm done to both the victim and the community. Sometimes the harmer is punished even if they are not unjust, so that the psychology of the community and the damage done can be repaired (see Roberts 1987, 34n1). One might accidentally harm someone and this might be a faultless mistake, but one must still accept a punishment to readdress the harm done and to address the psychology of the community. Although the senile are faultless when they commit wrongdoing, given that they are non-agential, they (or their family) must still repair the

damage done from their wrongdoing (9.864d–e). The point of punishing animals and inanimate objects that injure individuals (9.873e–874a) isn't to correct their behavior but, presumably, has to do with repairing the psychology of the community. Second, it isn't so obvious that the justice-loving atheist is actually just. He or she is asked not to talk about atheism and not to insult those who believe in the gods of the city. Provided that the atheist refuses to stop preaching atheism and ridiculing religious people, it isn't clear that he or she is just (10.908c–909a; Saunders 1991, 149–150).

We take these responses to be sufficient for overcoming the main objections to the mistake reading. Now we would like to argue that this reading has four advantages over the damage reading. First, the central meaning of *sphallō* means "cause to fall," "overthrow," "trip up," "to frustrate," "to stumble," and "to be mistaken"; insofar as the mistake reading falls within this usage, it is a mark in its favor.[23] Second, the damage reading can't make sense of the end of the passage, which indicates that the just type of action we are considering many people view as an instance of involuntary injustice. As Lorraine Pangle (2014, 263n20) explains, "For most people never simply equate acts done out of moral conviction that do some harm with involuntary injustice; if they did they would view all legal punishments as involuntary injustices." In contrast, it is plausible that individuals would view a blameless accident from a generally good person as involuntary injustice. Third, as we explained above, the mistake reading corresponds with the examples of involuntary homicide that the Athenian discusses. Fourth, the account we are presenting coheres with the general educational theme of the *Laws*: education is a harmony between feelings and judgment and hence isn't purely intellectual. Thus, it would make sense that justice and injustice aren't purely intellectual states but are rather understood as harmonies and disharmonies of the soul. If we are right about all of this, then Plato is clearly endorsing justice as being compatible with some forms of ignorance.

2.6 Summary

This chapter further corroborates our rejection of the Absolutist Evaluative Claim. In both the *Republic* and the *Laws*, Plato endorses useful falsehoods as a means of promoting true ethical commitments at the expense of false ethical explanations. Although Plato doesn't use the technical term "genuine falsehood" in the *Laws*, as he does in the *Republic*, he does describe the worst forms of ignorance in similar terms. In developing our interpretation of the *Laws*, we have put forth a solution to an important debate among scholars concerning persuasion. Persuasion in the *Laws* is neither fully rational nor non-rational; rather, it is pragmatic.

It should be clear from these first two chapters that ethical commitment is an essential concept of Plato's ethical framework. In the next

chapter we articulate in greater detail the structure of ethical commitments and the role they play in Plato's Pragmatism.

Notes

1 Hence, our reading challenges D. Williams' claim that the *Laws* differs from the *Republic* to the extent that "there is no noble lie in the *Laws*" because "a lie of that sort is simply inconsistent with his [Plato's] carefully considered assumptions" (2013, 385).
2 There is some speculation as to who this unnamed Athenian is. Aristotle (*Pol*. 2.6.1265a) thinks he is Socrates, Cicero (*Leg*. 1.5.15) holds that he is Plato himself, and Schofield (2006, 3) thinks that he is meant to remind the reader of the Athenian politician Solon.
3 Crete and Sparta are timocracies (i.e. cities run by honor); see *Resp*. 8.544c–545a; Morrow 1960, Part I. For Aristotle's criticism of these governments, see *Pol*. 2.9–10. For a discussion, see T. Pangle (1988, 379–385).
4 At 4.730a–b the contrast is between free born doctors and their assistants who may be free or slaves, but the Athenian goes on to contrast free doctors from slave doctors, so we do as well (see Schofield 2006, 97–98).
5 In Book 3, the Athenian criticizes Persia's monarchy because it is too despotic and doesn't allow for sufficient friendship and freedom. This both negatively affects the well-being of the citizens and makes them less likely to fight on behalf of the city (697c–698a; see Reid forthcoming).
6 This might seem rather trivial, but Megillus comes from a culture that praises short speeches. It is also significant because Plato holds that philosophy is distinguished from rhetoric in that philosophy is leisurely in terms of length, time, and content; rhetoric, in contrast, is restrictive in these respects (see *Tht*. 172c–177b and 200d–201c).
7 For other defenses of this reading, see Bobonich (1991); D. Cohen (1993); Hentschke (1971); Morgan (2000, 166); and Samaras (2002, Chap. 17).
8 To be clear, the term "non-rational" is a bit of a misnomer. Defenders of this position do not think that persuasion is devoid of reason or intellectual activity; rather, they wish to highlight the emotive aspect of the reasoning process (see Stalley 1994, 167 and Morrow 1953, 242).
9 For other defenses of this position, see Morrow (1953, 1960, 553–560); Stalley (1983, 42–44); and Yunis (1996, Chap. 9 and App. 1).
10 On the issue of sexual promiscuity, see 1.636c–d, 8.835b–841e; Clark (2000, 2003, 129–139); and Gonzalez (2013). On the issue of population see 5.737c–738b, 6.775b–776b, 6.783e–785b, 11.930c–d; Golding and Golding (1975); and T. Pangle (1988, 448).
11 Another point in favor of the non-rational interpretation is that the Athenian describes persuasion in terms of singing charms (*epōdai*) (2.659e, 2.664b, 2.665c, 2.666c, 2.670e, 7.773d, 7.812c, 8.872d, 10.903b, 10.906b, 10.909b, 11.933a–e, and 12.944b). Enchantment is typically associated with magic and sorcery; see Morrow (1953, 239) and Dodds (1951, 211–212); cf. *Chrm*. 157a–c and *Resp*. 10.608a.
12 Morrow (1960, 557n31) downplays the significance of the Athenian's clear tolerance for a lie at 2.663d–664a. Morrow (1953, 243) also writes, "The persuasion employed in his state is unquestionably concerned with instructing, i.e., inculcating true beliefs, as Plato thought them to be" (see also Stalley 1983, 42–43 and 1994, 167).
13 Samaras (2002, 312 and 362n11) defends a version of the rational interpretation, but he thinks that the cognitive state resulting from persuasion is true

belief. Samaras doubts that Plato thinks that knowledge is possible for the citizens of Magnesia (see also Trelawny-Cassity 2010).

14 Our analysis of these four arguments relies on Meyer's (Plato 2015, 264–278) reconstruction.

15 The relations of parts and wholes plays an important role in the formulation of the ethical axioms that Sidgwick takes to underlie utilitarianism. He sees the point of view of the larger whole to be ultimately reasonable, and from this point of view, it is clear that the total good of everyone is the ultimate reasonable end. The problem, however, is that Sidgwick finds the point of view of the individual equally reasonable, and he fails to see how it could be demonstrated that the individual point of view is any less authoritative than the "point of view of the universe." Hence, he concludes that practical reason is "divided against itself" (*Methods* 508). The key difference between Sidgwick and Plato is that Plato believes the two perspectives are harmonized insofar as just actions promote one's own good and the good of the whole simultaneously. Sidgwick criticizes this view, attributing it partly to a confusion regarding the two perspectives, and partly to (unfounded, though admirable) faith that the desired harmony exists. Sidgwick illustrates the point with a brief commentary on the *Gorgias*: "Partly, it seems to us more or less dexterous sophistry, playing on a confusion of thought latent in the common notion of good: partly a noble and stirring expression of profound moral faith" (*Methods* 405n1). For a discussion of Sidgwick, eudaimonism, and moral faith, see Paytas (2020). For more on the relationship between *eudaimonia*, other-regarding goods, and politics in the *Law*s, see Irwin (2010).

16 To be clear, these myths can serve other purposes than the three discussed above. For instance, the myth at 9.865d–e will aid the wrongdoer in accepting their exile—it is in their best interest to leave because a ghost will haunt them if they don't.

17 The narrative structure of this story is rather convoluted, but the details of it are not relevant for our purposes. What is relevant is that the passage illustrates Plato's characters rejecting the literal truth of a myth while still recognizing some true aspects of it; cf. *Phdr*. 229c–230a.

18 Bobonich (2002, 107–109) argues that the fact that all citizens have some training in mathematics marks an important difference from the *Republic*. Since mathematics involves the study of nonsensible things, this means that all citizens will be exposed to the idea of nonsensible things. This seems like an overstatement, however. Only a select few will study mathematics with precision (7.818a). The majority will merely learn enough mathematics for practical activities (7.809c), and most of this education will come in the form of play during their childhood (7.819b–d; 7.820d) (see Morrow 1960, 343–348).

19 Many preludes make some reference to the gods; see, for example, 2.663d–664a, 4.713a–715d, 9.865d–e, 9.870d–e, 9.872d–873a, and 11.913c–914b.

20 For defenses of more moderate readings, see Annas (2017, 96–100); Buccioni (2007); and Fossheim (2013).

21 There are roughly three broad ways of construing the mistake reading (Stalley 1983, 158–159). First, one can hold that justice is compatible with being mistaken about what is good. For an extensive list of older scholarship defending this view see O'Brien (1957, 81–83); see also Adkins (1960, 304–311). Second, one can hold that justice is compatible with being mistaken about some non-moral facts (see Roberts 1987 and Schofield 2012). Third, one can hold that justice is compatible with being mistaken about the means of achieving some truly good end (see Görgemanns 1960, 136–140; Schöpsdau 1984, 113; and Mackenzie 1981, 249; cf. Saunders 1968,

429–430; 1991, 146–150). Schofield (Plato 2016, 339n24) is quite right when he says, "This long sentence is not Plato's writing at its most pellucid, and commentators disagree about the interpretation of the clause specifying conditions under which action is said to be just. These are presumably meant to spell out the kind of case where the fault of ignorance is in play, but where the agent's character is sound, and action is aimed at a true conception of what is best (864b)."

22 MacDowell (1978, 113–114) explains: "Some kinds of killing were lawful and incurred no penalty. In an athletic contest, such as boxing or wrestling, a man who accidentally killed his opponent was not liable to punishment; neither was a man who, in war, killed another by mistake for an enemy. If a patient died while under the care of a doctor, the doctor was not liable to punishment" (see also MacDowell 1963, 73–79; Demosthenes *Against Aristocrates* 57.3; E. Harris 2013, 185–186; Aristotle *Mag. mor.* 188b25–37; Antiphon 1, *Against the Stepmother*).

23 Plato typically uses this word in the traditional sense (see *Cra.* 436c3, 436c8; *Tht.* 165b1, 166b1, 167e6, 196b2; *Soph.* 229c6; *Alc.* 132b8; *Euthyd.* 296a9; *Prt.* 361d1; *Grg.* 461c7, 461d1; *Hp. mi.* 372b3; *Ti.* 42b5; *Criti.* 121a3; *Epist.* 7.351d7, 7.351d8, 7.351e2; *Resp.* 2.361a2, 2.361b2, 3.396d3, 5.451a2, 5.451a4, 5.467b4; and *Leg.* 1.648e2, 6.771e4). There is one use in the *Laws* that is anomalous: at 6.769c4, Plato uses the word to describe the depreciation of a painting through time. But even then, "injury" or "harm" seems like an inappropriate translation for a painting falling apart through time. In contrast, "injury" or "harm" are almost always appropriate translations of *blabē*. Even England (1921, *ad loc.*), who defends the damage reading, notes that his reading is strained.

3 The Ring of Gyges and the Nature of Ethical Commitments

> [T]he description "just," as applied to a man or a woman, speaks of how it is with him or her in respect of the acceptance of a certain group of considerations as reasons for action ... The just person *aims* at keeping promises, paying what is owed, and defending those whose rights are being violated, so far as such actions are required by the virtue of justice. Likewise, he recognizes certain limitations on what he may do even for some virtue-given end.
>
> (Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* 12)

In the previous two chapters, we have shown that Plato endorses the judicious use of false ethical explanations for the sake of cultivating true ethical commitments. That is, Plato is willing to tolerate false beliefs about *why* an action is correct when this facilitates formation of the true belief *that* the action is correct, along with the motivation to act accordingly. This may seem to suggest that Plato's ethics is primarily concerned with individual acts and their material consequences. One of the aims of this chapter is to demonstrate that our pragmatic interpretation doesn't have this implication. This is important because thinking narrowly in terms of actions and outcomes when examining Plato's ethics tends to obscure its essential structure. We will argue that Plato's chief concern is ethical commitments (i.e. dispositions, motivations, and affective states) and that acts and outcomes are of secondary importance.

Although our primary aim in this book is to show that Plato does not value truth above all else, we readily grant that truth is a central Platonic value. Indeed, orientation towards the truth is one of the ethical commitments that one ought to have. Thus, our pragmatist interpretation gives rise to the following puzzle: if ethical commitments are of the utmost importance, and a commitment to sound epistemic practices is among them, how can endorsement of falsehood be rationally justified? Wouldn't such endorsement be akin to an environmental activist lobbying for the fossil fuel industry? If Plato were interested only in promoting optimal states of affairs, there would be no puzzle here since the policy could

simply be to lie whenever doing so leads to the best outcome. However, because ethical commitments are *commitments*, we must account for the apparent tension. Hence, the second aim of this chapter is to explain what ethical commitments entail. Do such commitments require us always to reflectively endorse promoting and supporting their objects?

We can gain insight into both of these issues by exploring an influential critique of the ring of Gyges argument from *Republic* 2. As part of his case against the superiority of justice, Glaucon claims that anyone who came into possession of an invisibility ring would commit the same deplorable acts that Gyges committed. Glaucon adds to this that anyone who refrained from injustice in such circumstances would be labeled a fool by everyone else (360d). While he seemingly aims to show that people value justice only for its consequences and never for its own sake, some commentators claim that his argument could not succeed (Irwin 1999; Shields 2006). This is because endorsement of Gyges' actions is ostensibly compatible with assigning *some* intrinsic value to justice—one might simply judge this value to be outweighed by the allure of wealth and power.

While this critique is initially plausible, its plausibility diminishes when we focus on the nature of intrinsic valuing within a Platonic eudaimonistic framework. We shall argue that the relevant valuing involves an ethical commitment, and such commitment precludes judging that the value of justice can be outweighed by material goods.

The immediate upshot is that Glaucon's challenge to the superiority of the just life is more formidable than critics maintain. However, what's most important for present purposes is what this discussion reveals about Platonic ethics and epistemology. By pinpointing exactly where the critique of the Gyges argument goes wrong, we gain a better understanding of the aims of Plato's Pragmatism: the ultimate goal is not right actions and their immediate consequences but rather the attainment of good character. The way to achieve this goal is to cultivate the right ethical commitments. However, since human beings are limited by their ignorance and irrational impulses, falsehoods are sometimes necessary for initiating and sustaining these commitments. Hence, while ethical commitments involve rational endorsement of the relevant norms, the Platonic commitment to veracity is compatible with the utilization of lies and untruths.

3.1 The Compatibility Thesis

Republic 2 begins with Glaucon expressing dissatisfaction with Socrates' arguments for the claim that it is better to be just than unjust. Although he is not entirely skeptical about the value of justice, Glaucon claims that he has yet to hear a convincing argument praising justice for its own sake (357b–c, 358b, 358d, 366e, and 367b–e).[1] Glaucon recounts the story of Gyges' ring in order to bolster the case against justice. According to the

story, a shepherd named Gyges came into possession of a ring that makes its wearer invisible. Gyges used this power of invisibility to seduce the king's wife, kill the king, and take over the kingdom (360a–c). Glaucon argues that anyone who came into possession of such a ring would perform unjust acts, and that anyone who would refrain from injustice in such circumstances "would be thought wretched and stupid by everyone aware of the situation" (360d5–6). Glaucon presents this as strong evidence that justice is thought to be valuable only in circumstances in which one lacks the power to get away with injustice; whenever we can attain greater benefits through injustice, we judge that we ought to do so (359b).

As indicated above, Irwin and Shields claim that Glaucon's argument couldn't show that we value justice only for its consequences because believing that power and wealth outweigh justice in some circumstances doesn't thereby commit one to denying that justice is a good to be pursued for its own sake. This objection has prima facie plausibility. After all, thinking *X* has intrinsic value is perfectly consistent with deliberately choosing *Y* over *X* in some cases. So, someone might choose an unjust course of action not because they don't value justice for its own sake but because of the opportunity costs involved in remaining just (Shields 2006, 79).[2] With these points in mind, Irwin writes, "Glaucon should ask not only whether we care about justice for its own sake, but also how much we care about it" (1999, 173).[3]

Let us call the claim that valuing justice intrinsically is compatible with reflective endorsement of unjust acts the "compatibility thesis." Irwin suggests that the attitude underlying the compatibility thesis is not unfamiliar, as illustrated by the following example:

> Some people are willing to be considerate if it costs them nothing, but unwilling if it involves even the smallest instrumental cost. If I find a private letter of yours that is of no use to me, and I have a choice between putting it back in your letter box and throwing it on the ground, and each action is equally easy, I might think it intrinsically better to put it back in your letter box. But if it cost me the least trouble, I would not put it in your letter box.
>
> (1999, 173)

This example shows that we can coherently think that the interests of others generate reasons for action while judging that these reasons can be overridden by other considerations. And it would appear that this point can be applied to the case of the ring of Gyges: one might value justice for its own sake while judging that this value can be overridden by the value of wealth and power. Thus, even if Glaucon is right that everyone would agree that Gyges had decisive reason to act unjustly, it doesn't follow that everyone assigns mere instrumental value to justice.

If the compatibility thesis is correct, this raises the question of what exactly the Gyges argument is intended to establish. Is Glaucon aiming to show that justice is not valued intrinsically, but simply oblivious to the fact that universal endorsement of Gyges' actions could not substantiate this claim? According to Irwin, Glaucon has a different aim: the intended conclusion of the Gyges argument is that valuing justice only for its consequences commits us to rational endorsement of unjust actions in circumstances of immunity. Irwin presents the following schematization:

1. Justice is good (we suppose) only for its consequences.
2. Hence, in circumstances where we can gain the good consequences of injustice without the normal bad consequences, and the bad consequences of justice are not offset by its good consequences, we have good reason to act unjustly.
3. Gyges' ring provides such a situation because it removes the danger of punishment for unjust action.
4. Hence, in a situation relevantly similar to Gyges' ring, we have good reason to act unjustly. (1999, 171)

Irwin claims that Glaucon's argument succeeds in showing that if we value justice only for its consequences, then we must endorse behaving as Gyges did (1999, 172). But this raises a further question. If Glaucon's argument supports only the conditional claim that *if* we value justice solely for its consequences then we are committed to endorsing Gyges' behavior, why does Plato include the argument at all? Taken by itself, the conclusion of the argument tells us little about the value of justice and our actual attitudes towards it.

One might follow Shields (2006, 76–77) in viewing the Gyges argument as of little utility for Glaucon's purposes but rightly included by Plato as a mechanism for causing readers to reflect on their level of commitment to justice. But it is clear that Glaucon takes the thought experiment to have probative force in regards to his dialectical aims, and so we should adopt this reading only after we have exhausted alternatives that would give the argument more significance.

Irwin proposes such an alternative. On his reading, what Glaucon aims to show is not that we value justice only instrumentally, but rather that we do not think justice is more valuable than injustice *in all circumstances*. Irwin notes that in the first paragraph of Book 2, Glaucon frames the debate in terms of the question of whether justice is better than injustice "in every way" (1999, 174). Glaucon asks Socrates, "Do you want to seem to have persuaded us that it is better *in every way* [*panti tropōi*] to be just than unjust, or do you want to truly convince us of this?" (357a4–b2, emphasis added). Irwin (1999, 175) suggests that we should understand "in every way" (*panti tropōi*) to mean "better in every possible circumstance." Thus, what Glaucon seeks to show with the Gyges

argument is not that we think justice is of mere instrumental value, but rather that we do not think it is a non-instrumental good to be chosen in every possible situation (1999, 175).

The appeal to the "in every way" clause provides a reasonable explanation for the role of the Gyges argument that meshes with Irwin's analysis. However, the context in which the argument is presented makes Irwin's conclusion rather surprising. Note that just before recounting the story of Gyges' ring, Glaucon provides a threefold classification of goods: (1) goods valued and chosen for their own sake (e.g. joy and harmless pleasure), (2) goods valued and chosen for their own sake and also for the sake of their consequences (e.g. knowledge, sight, and health), and (3) goods that are burdensome in themselves and thus valued and chosen only for their consequences (e.g. physical training, medical treatment, the practice of medicine, and other ways of making money) (357b–d).[4] Glaucon then claims that most people take justice to be a good of the third kind (358a), and he notes that he has yet to hear a compelling defense of justice in which it is praised *by itself* (358b). After the division of the goods and just before the introduction of the Gyges argument, Glaucon states that the second stage of the argument involves arguing that "all who practice it do so unwillingly, as something compulsory, not as something good" (358c2–4). Shortly thereafter, he prefaces the Gyges story with the following remarks:

> We can see most clearly that those who practice justice do it unwillingly and because they lack the power to do injustice, if in our thoughts we grant to a just and an unjust person the freedom to do whatever they like. We can then follow both of them and see where their appetite would lead and we'll catch the just person red-handed, travelling the same road as the unjust. The reason for this is the desire to outdo others and get more and more [*tēn pleonxian*]. This is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good, but nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness [*tou isou*] with respect. The freedom I mentioned would be most easily recognized if both people had the power they say the ancestor of Gyges of Lydia possessed.
>
> (359b7–d2)

These remarks give a clear impression that the purpose of the Gyges story is to support the claim that we view justice as something burdensome in itself and choiceworthy only in those instances in which it brings good consequences.[5]

Although we have seen reasonable grounds for believing that the Gyges argument cannot show that justice is valued only instrumentally, the preceding textual evidence strongly indicates that this was Glaucon's aim. We thus have good reasons to subject the compatibility thesis to further scrutiny.

3.2 Normative Objects and the Limiting Requirement

At first glance, the claim that valuing justice for its own sake is compatible with believing that considerations of justice can be offset by the allure of wealth and power seems plausible. Viewing something as choiceworthy in and of itself doesn't commit one to valuing that thing above all else. Nonetheless, if we look closely at the ring of Gyges and what it asks us to consider, this analysis begins to appear less plausible. In order to see this, one must first consider that the genuineness of our evaluative judgments is contingent upon our behaviors, dispositions, and the related judgments that we make. This is seen most readily when the object of our valuing is itself partly constituted by ethical norms or standards. Let us call the various ethical principles, moral ideals, and virtues that one might value "normative objects."[6] If an agent genuinely values a normative object for its own sake (as opposed to merely feigning to do so), then she will not reflectively endorse behaviors and attitudes that directly violate the principles and standards of which it is composed. This is because intrinsically valuing a normative object involves endorsement of the constitutive principles and standards.

To illustrate, consider the case of a hiring manager who claims to value racial equality for its own sake. Suppose this manager consistently and intentionally favors job applications from members of her own race even when they are less qualified than other applicants. When confronted about her hiring practices the manager says, "I do care about racial equality for its own sake, but I also believe that whenever anyone has a chance to favor a member of their own race, that's the right thing to do." All else being equal, valuing racial equality for its own sake is incompatible with endorsing overtly racist attitudes and behaviors. Hence, we can conclude that the hiring manager either doesn't know what racial equality is or her claim to value it intrinsically is mere lip service.

This is not to say that under no circumstances can a hiring manager value racial equality intrinsically while knowingly participating in a racist hiring practice—exceptional circumstances can arise. It might be the case that a racist CEO threatens to fire the hiring manager if she doesn't hire persons of a certain race. The hiring manager may sincerely want to refrain from this practice while also knowing that if she doesn't comply, she will lose her job and health insurance, and thus have no means to care for her sick daughter. If the hiring manager decides to follow the CEO's orders, it can still be true that she values racial equality for its own sake; it may just be that she values the life and health of her daughter even more.

As the second hiring manager case makes clear, exceptional circumstances can make it possible for a person to value a normative object intrinsically while still acting in ways that might undermine it. But the crucial point is that the circumstances that render the flouting of a normative

object compatible with valuing it for its own sake cannot be constituted by the very considerations that the normative object precludes from having justificatory weight. The reason it is certain that the first hiring manager doesn't value racial equality for its own sake is that the ideal of racial equality precludes the mere fact that another person is a member of one's race from justifying the preferential treatment of that person—this preclusion is an essential element of the normative object. In contrast, it might still be true that the hiring manager in the second scenario values racial equality for its own sake because the ideal of racial equality doesn't preclude a concern for the health and safety of one's child from justifying the preferential treatment of members of a certain race—such a preclusion is not an essential element of the normative object. Perhaps a person who is willing to engage in racist practices for the sake of her child's healthcare doesn't value racial equality as much as she ought to, but we cannot conclude that she doesn't value it intrinsically at all. However, we can be confident that the agent who engages in and reflectively endorses racist practices precisely because she believes that racial identity justifies preferential treatment doesn't value racial equality for its own sake. We can be confident about this because the agent clearly rejects principles and standards that are central to the ideal of racial equality.

The idea of reflective endorsement is important because it allows for the possibility that the akratic agent acts against values she holds intrinsically. So long as the akratic agent does not reflectively endorse the behavior that she displays in moments of weakness, it is possible that she intrinsically values the objects that she is acting against. Indeed, this explains the phenomenology of acting akratically—one experiences guilt and regret because one is acting against the values one genuinely holds.

Let us turn then to the case of justice. As a normative object, justice is similar to racial equality in that genuinely valuing it for its own sake involves endorsing its essential principles and standards. Hence, valuing justice for its own sake is incompatible with rational endorsement of undermining behaviors when the ostensible justification for the undermining involves considerations that justice itself precludes from having justificatory weight. To see what the relevant considerations are, we need to look closely at what justice encompasses. Returning to the context of the *Republic*, we must remember that the discussants in Book 2 have yet to complete their investigation into the nature and value of justice. However, any such investigation must begin with some basic assumptions. One reasonable assumption about justice is what we call the "limiting requirement":

> Limiting Requirement: Being a just person requires viewing the interests of others as placing limits on what one can permissibly do in pursuit of effective goods (e.g. wealth and political power).[7]

Although there is room for debate about the precise location of the boundary between just and unjust pursuit of effective goods, that justice involves restrictions on what can permissibly be done to others in an effort to become rich and powerful is hard to deny. At the very least, a willingness to cause or allow substantial harms to innocent people in order to obtain extravagant wealth or political influence is incompatible with justice. An individual who doesn't see the welfare of others as placing *any* limits on the pursuit of personal profit is paradigmatically unjust. Hence, we believe that all plausible conceptions of justice include the basic idea articulated by the limiting requirement.[8]

Nor are we alone in thinking this, as is evident in the following remarks by Philippa Foot in her article, "Moral Beliefs":

> The reason why it seems to some people so impossibly difficult to show that justice is more profitable than injustice is that they consider in isolation just acts. It is perfectly true that if a man is just it follows that he will be prepared, in the event of very evil circumstances, even to face death rather than to act unjustly—for instance, in getting an innocent man convicted of a crime of which he has been accused. For him it turns out that his justice brings disaster on him, and yet like anyone else he had good reason to be a just and not an unjust man. He could not have it both ways and while possessing the virtue of justice hold himself ready to be unjust should any great advantage accrue. The man who has the virtue of justice is not ready to do certain things, and if he is too easily tempted we shall say that he was ready after all.
>
> (2002, 129–130)

Foot's point is that the virtue of justice excludes a willingness to do vicious actions for the sake of mere personal gain—if unjust acts come too easily to one's mind, one lacks justice.

The limiting requirement not only seems central to any plausible conception of justice but also seems to be part of Glaucon's conception of justice. First, the fact that justice places limits on the pursuit of wealth and power explains why he has doubts about the value of justice in the first place. It is precisely because justice appears to conflict with self-interest in some circumstances that he implores Socrates to provide a rousing defense. Second, note that the idea expressed by the limiting requirement falls under the broad notion of fairness. A person who doesn't view the interests of others as placing limits on what can defensibly be done in pursuit of wealth and power is someone who places no weight on considerations of fairness. This is important because, as we have seen, Glaucon invokes the notion of fairness when prefacing the Gyges argument in Book 2. In explaining why the ostensibly just person will act exactly as the unjust person would in circumstances of immunity, Glaucon says, "The

reason for this is the desire to outdo others and get more and more [*tēn pleonxian*]. This is what anyone's nature naturally pursues as good, but nature is forced by law into the perversion of treating fairness [*tou isou*] with respect" (359c4–c6). Here Glaucon uses "fairness" as interchangeable with "justice," and the limiting requirement is clearly involved in any plausible notion of fairness (see *Grg.* 484a–e, 489a–b, 508a–b; *Leg.* 5.744c–d, 6.757a–758a; Arist. *Pol.* 5.1.1301b29–1302a8; and *Eth. Nic.* 5.3.1131a25–5.51133b28).

One might object by raising the possibility that Glaucon is simply thinking of justice as a list of rules such as "always pay your debts," and so it is not clear that he has anything like the limiting requirement in mind. However, this is highly unlikely given that Socrates has already provided grounds for rejecting this conception of justice in response to Cephalus in Book 1 (331c). Moreover, the paradigmatic rules of justice involve refraining from certain self-interested acts (such as deciding not to repay a debt when one can get away with it) when they impose harms on others. Thus, even if such rules are central to the concept of justice, it is fair to say that something approximating the limiting requirement is operative.

The plausibility of the limiting requirement as central to the notion of justice raises a difficulty for the claim that valuing justice for its own sake is compatible with judging that the allure of fame and fortune can justify completely disregarding the welfare of others (as Gyges did). Intrinsically valuing justice involves approving of the norms that are central to it. Hence, a person who values justice intrinsically endorses a norm requiring that the interests of others be viewed as a constraint on one's pursuit of effective goods. It is hard to reconcile such a judgment with a rational endorsement of sacrificing the lives of innocents for the sake of power and wealth. Given the centrality of the limiting requirement to the very notion of justice, the analysis we are challenging would attribute the following set of judgments to the agent in question:

A. One ought to view the interests of others as placing limits on what one can defensibly do in pursuit of power and wealth.
B. Whenever the potential gain in power and wealth is sizeable enough, one is justified in acting with utter disregard for the interests of others.[9]

The tension between these judgments undermines the plausibility of the compatibility thesis. It is difficult to see how one could view the intrinsic value of justice as overridable by the very sort of consideration that it constitutively takes precedence over. Given the limiting requirement, if you value justice for its own sake, the object of your valuing includes a norm stating that no amount of money could justify disregarding the interests of others. The agent postulated by the compatibility thesis is

someone who believes that large sums of money would in fact justify disregarding the interests of others. An individual who explicitly rejects a norm that is central to justice is certainly not somebody who values justice intrinsically.

One might try defending the compatibility thesis by pointing to less extreme cases in which an agent who rationally endorses an unjust act might plausibly be seen as valuing justice for its own sake nonetheless. Consider, for instance, Jean Valjean's theft of bread to avoid starvation in *Les Miserables*, or Robin Hood's robbing from the rich to give to the poor. Many of us are inclined to endorse the actions of these protagonists, and it would be surprising if this endorsement precluded us from valuing justice intrinsically.

In considering this reply, the first thing to note is that the limiting requirement doesn't prohibit all instances of harm, or even all acts of thievery. What is precluded is failing to view the interests of others as placing any limits on one's pursuit of personal profit. If Valjean and Robin of Locksley were happily stealing from the innocent in order to make themselves rich, few of us would be inclined to endorse their behavior. This leads to the crucial point: it is far from clear that the thefts depicted in these stories really constitute violations of justice. Since it is uncertain whether justice has been violated, our endorsement of the relevant actions cannot tell us anything definitive about our evaluative attitudes towards justice. Thus, our judgments about marginal cases, in which it is debatable whether justice has been violated, are not relevant for present purposes. This is one of the reasons why Plato chooses the extreme example of Gyges as a test case for our evaluative attitudes towards justice. If we judge that seducing a married person, killing her spouse, and seizing political power through force are all justifiable, and that anyone who would refrain from such acts in circumstances of immunity is "wretched and stupid," then it is clear that we do not endorse the central norms of justice. And, as we have been arguing, if you do not endorse the essential standards of a normative object such as justice, it follows that you do not value it for its own sake.

3.3 Intrinsic Valuing within a Eudaimonist Framework

While we believe that the case against the compatibility thesis is decisive, it is easy to see why it has seemed plausible to commentators. When considering evaluative attitudes, there is a natural tendency to think in terms of the comparative value assigned to possible states of affairs without particular regard for how one's own agency is connected to them. And if valuing justice for its own sake were merely a matter of preferring states of affairs in which justice is generally realized over those in which it is not (when all else is equal), then the compatibility thesis would be true.

To see why, it will help to once again consider the example of racial equality. Strange as it would be, it is possible for an agent to assign intrinsic value to states of affairs in which racial equality is widely practiced while also believing that she has decisive reason to prioritize the interests of members of her race. Perhaps the agent attributes *no* value to states of affairs in which individuals favor members of races other than her own, *some* value to states of affairs in which racial equality prevails, and *most* value to states of affairs in which everyone favors members of her own race. Likewise, it is possible for an agent to assign *some* intrinsic value to states of affairs in which justice is widely practiced while still preferring unjust states of affairs in which she becomes rich and powerful. Hence, if valuing justice for its own sake were only a matter of having certain preferences concerning states of affairs, it would be true that assigning intrinsic value to justice is compatible with endorsing Gyges' behavior.

However, while we grant that agents with the evaluative attitudes described above are conceivable, they would not value the respective normative objects (racial equality and justice) intrinsically—at least not in the relevant sense. Assigning some intrinsic value to states of affairs in which racial equality obtains is not the same as valuing racial equality *itself*—i.e. racial equality qua normative object. A person who intrinsically values a normative object itself is someone who accepts and embraces the central principles and requirements for herself (and believes others ought to do the same). This explains why it would be inapt to describe the agent from the previous example, whose strongest preference is for a world in which everyone prioritizes the interests of her own race, as someone who values racial equality for its own sake. While she does have certain preferences for states of affairs in which racial equality prevails, if she valued racial equality *itself* for its own sake, she would not simultaneously endorse directly flouting the norms that are essential to it. The same goes for the agent who has a general preference for just states of affairs but whose strongest preference is for unjust states of affairs in which she obtains extravagant wealth. Given that this agent rejects a norm that is essential to justice (i.e. the limiting requirement), it is clear that she does not value justice itself for its own sake.

That the relevant assessment concerns valuing normative objects themselves rather than merely having preferences for certain states of affairs is clear from the context of the debate in Book 2. The discussion occurs within a eudaimonist framework, in which the central question is about the ends and ideals that a person must pursue and adopt in order to live well.[10] This is evident from the wording of the dialogue. When Socrates declares that justice is among the "finest goods," he says that "anyone who is going to be *blessed with happiness* must love it both because of itself and because of its consequences" (ἐγὼ μὲν οἶμαι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ἐν τῷ καλλίστῳ, ὃ καὶ δι' αὑτὸ καὶ διὰ τὰ γιγνόμενα ἀπ' αὐτοῦ ἀγαπητέον τῷ μέλλοντι μακαρίῳ ἔσεσθαι) (358a1–3, emphasis added). The reference to

the agent's own happiness is evidence that the topic of concern is whether justice is intrinsically good *for the agent* who pursues it. Consider also Glaucon's introduction of the third category of goods: "We'd say that these are burdensome but *beneficial to us*, and we wouldn't *choose* them for their own sakes, but for the sake of the rewards and other things that come from them" (ταῦτα γὰρ ἐπίπονα φαῖμεν ἄν, ὠφελεῖν δὲ ἡμᾶς, καὶ αὐτὰ μὲν ἑαυτῶν ἕνεκα οὐκ ἂν δεξαίμεθα ἔχειν, τῶν δὲ μισθῶν τε χάριν καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα γίγνεται ἀπ᾽ αὐτῶν) (357c8–d2, emphasis added). Clearly the discussants are investigating whether justice is (and ought to be) chosen as a non-instrumental part of one's own good. And a person who chooses to pursue justice as a non-instrumental part of her good is someone who values justice itself in the sense outlined above—she accepts and embraces the central norms of justice for herself.

The tendency to slip outside of the eudaimonist framework when thinking about questions of value explains why many readers of the *Republic* are prone to have the same concerns articulated by Irwin and Shields. But when we are careful to frame the issue in terms of pursuing justice as part of one's own good, it becomes clearer that a rational endorsement of Gyges' behavior amounts to a denial of the intrinsic value of justice. Note first that an agent who pursues justice as a non-instrumental part of her good is someone who is striving to become a just person. Such an agent would not think that it is enough to perform the acts that a just person would on only those occasions in which she would not profit from injustice. This is because the non-instrumental value of justice could not be realized by the mere performance of a handful of ostensibly just acts; the value could only be realized by *being* just (or at least striving to become just). And one cannot make a sincere effort to become just while maintaining a policy of being willing to disregard the interests of others whenever the potential profits of doing so are sufficiently great. So, in order for justice to be a non-instrumental part of one's good *at all*, the agent must have a certain level of commitment to it—no intrinsic value can be realized without a stable commitment (even if one regularly performs acts that a just person would perform).

This is not to say that an agent who chooses to pursue justice as a non-instrumental part of her good will never feel tempted to act unjustly. Indeed, many such agents will feel these temptations, and sometimes they will act upon them. This is because our bodily appetites and other such impulses do not automatically align with our considered evaluative judgments, and sometimes we succumb to temptation against our better judgment. Hence, the relevant commitment that must be present in order for the non-instrumental value of justice to be realized in one's life is not of such a degree that the agent could never act unjustly or even feel tempted to do so. Rather, the agent who values justice in the relevant sense is someone who would not calmly and reflectively endorse clear violations of the basic norms of justice. Gyges' ring is a pertinent test case for our

attitudes towards justice not because of the fact that Gyges himself happened to succumb to temptation, nor even because of the possibility that most of us would do the same. What makes the story of such high interest is Glaucon's claim that everyone would give a rational endorsement of such behavior, were they to answer honestly.

We take the preceding considerations to show that the compatibility thesis cannot be upheld within a eudaimonist framework. It does not make sense for anyone to choose justice as a non-instrumental part of their good while also believing that this value can be outweighed by power and money. This set of attitudes does not make sense because, if you believe the value of justice can be outweighed in this way, then you do not have the type of commitment that could make justice a non-instrumentally valuable part of your good in the first place. Since the people who endorse Gyges' acts do not have a commitment to justice of the requisite stability, it follows that they have not chosen justice as a non-instrumental part of their good (because it is obvious that the ostensible value could not be realized without the commitment). In light of these points, we reconstruct Glaucon's argument as follows:

1. Any agent who chooses to pursue justice as a non-instrumental part of their good is someone who strives to become a just person.
2. Any agent who strives to become a just person is someone with a reasonably stable commitment to justice; their reflective endorsement of giving consideration to the interests of others does not depend on the amount of riches obtainable by disregarding those interests.
3. Any agent who chooses to pursue justice as a non-instrumental part of their good is someone with a reasonably stable commitment to justice. (1–2)
4. Anyone who would reflectively endorse Gyges' acts does not have a reasonably stable commitment to justice.
5. Everyone would reflectively endorse Gyges' acts (at least in private).
6. Nobody has a reasonably stable commitment to justice. (4–5)
7. Nobody chooses justice as a non-instrumental part of their good. (3 and 6)

On this characterization, the goal of the Gyges argument is not just to refute the claim that most people think justice is *always* more choiceworthy than injustice. Rather, the goal is to show that none of us value justice for its own sake *at all*.[11]

Note that the issue of commitment does not arise for all possible objects that one might choose as a non-instrumental part of one's good. Consider, for instance, athletic excellence. Martina can choose athletic excellence as a non-instrumental part of her good while also believing that this value can be outweighed by a certain amount of money and power. If someone offered Martina a million dollars to give up all of

her athletic pursuits permanently, she might be willing to take the deal. But notice that this lack of a stable commitment to athletic excellence as against pursuit of power and wealth doesn't prevent the value of athletic excellence from being realized in Martina's life. She can choose athletic excellence as a non-instrumental part of her good and actually realize this value despite the fact that she knows she would give it up for a million dollars. This is because the goodness of Martina's athletic excellence inheres in the training and performance—these things are not diminished by the fact that she would retire from her sport for a certain amount of money. In other words, the non-instrumental contribution to her good that is realized through her athletic excellence does not in any way depend on her being committed to athletic excellence such that she would never compromise it for the sake of money. In contrast, the goodness of performing ostensibly just acts *is* diminished if one is not committed to justice. This is because the value can only be realized through *being* just (or at least striving towards becoming just). And being just is not a matter of simply performing certain acts—one also needs commitment.

3.4 The Importance of Ethical Commitments

According to our proposed analysis, the Gyges argument presents a more serious challenge to justice than is often thought. Glaucon is working under the assumption that valuing justice intrinsically commits one to viewing the interests of others as placing limits on what may be done in pursuit of effective goods such as power and wealth. And because the ostensible intrinsic value of justice could be realized only through striving to be just, the lack of commitment to justice revealed by our endorsement of Gyges' actions shows that we have not chosen to pursue justice as a non-instrumental part of our good.

If nobody chooses to pursue justice for its own sake, this is a prima facie reason to doubt that it *ought* to be chosen for its own sake; we would need strong reasons for believing that so many people are making such a significant error. Hence, Plato includes the Gyges story in the dialogue not merely to force us to think about the extent of our commitment to justice but also because it represents a strong challenge to the supposed superiority of the just life.

Socrates responds to this challenge by arguing that those who endorse Gyges' actions do so only because they fail to understand the ways in which injustice is ultimately bad for the individual. We will not take a stand on the question of whether his reply succeeds. What we wish to emphasize are the lessons about the concept of Platonic ethical commitment that can be extracted from the foregoing analysis of the Gyges argument. For Plato, choosing to pursue an ethical ideal such as justice for its own sake involves having a stable commitment to the norms and

standards that compose it. Hence, insofar as justice is one of the cornerstones of Plato's ethical outlook, the ultimate Platonic aim is not the mere performance of ostensibly just actions and the obtaining of their immediate consequences. Rather, the ultimate aim is for individuals to develop good character, which consists in a state of psychological harmony and a stable commitment to justice and goodness. This explains why the false beliefs in the Kallipolis and Magnesia are systematic—they are not simply designed so that citizens do a handful of correct actions, but rather so that they can start to develop the correct values and character over time.

Unfortunately, non-philosophers are not in a position to arrive at the right ethical commitments through straightforward means. It would certainly be best if everyone could immediately gain knowledge of the deep reasons why some ways of living are better than others. But if the rulers tried to directly explain these reasons, the ordinary citizens wouldn't believe them, which could in turn lead the citizens even further down the wrong path. It is for this reason that certain lies become necessary.

In order to promote justice within the city and virtue within individuals, the first step is to help citizens learn to act rightly in a reliable way. As Socrates states in Book 4, just actions produce justice in the soul, and fine ways of living lead to virtue (which is the ultimate goal) (444c–d). So, although it is ethical commitments rather than actions that ultimately matter, right conduct does play an important role. Through habitual right action we begin to develop the right motivations, which is a necessary means for developing psychological harmony and good character. Once the citizens consistently conduct themselves appropriately, they can then become more attuned to the deeper ethical reasons that justify their conduct.

Consider again the noble lie. As we noted in Chapter 1, there is a unifying and a separating aspect to the myth. The unifying aspect pulls the city together by teaching the citizens that they are all related. Socrates says, "Therefore, if anyone attacks the land in which they live, they must plan on its behalf and defend it as their mother and nurse and think of the other citizens as their earthborn siblings" (3.414e2–5). Not only does such a story help unite citizens against external threats, it prevents internal fighting by giving the auxiliaries and the ruling class a personal reason to care about the well-being of the producers. Indeed, just before introducing the lie, Socrates says:

> Mustn't they [i.e. the rulers] care for the city? … Now one cares most for what one loves … and someone loves something most of all when he believes that the same things are advantageous to it as to himself and supposes that if it does well, he'll do well, and that if it does badly, then he'll do badly too.
>
> (3.412c14–d7)

The importance of civic unity is reiterated in Book 5:

> SOC.: Is there any greater evil we can mention for a city than that which tears it apart and makes it many instead of one? Or any greater good than that which binds it together and makes it one?
> GLAU.: There isn't.
> SOC.: And when, as far as possible, all the citizens rejoice and are pained by the same successes and failures, doesn't this sharing of pleasures and pains bind the city together? (462a9–b6)

The unifying aspect of the noble lie works on two different levels. On the mythical level, the unifying aspect teaches the citizens that their mother is the native land, and thus that they are all siblings. On the ethical level, the unifying aspect teaches the citizens that they should care for each other as they would their own biological brothers and sisters. The unifying aspect is able to do this by cleverly playing off the citizens' natural disposition to care for their close biological relatives. Hence, by making the citizens falsely believe that they are all close biological relatives, the lie makes them more likely to care for each other as their own.

The separating aspect of the noble lie separates the citizens into different classes, but it does so in such a way that harmony is sustained. It accomplishes this by providing an explanation for why different citizens have different political obligations and lifestyles. The idea is that such an explanation will lead the citizens to believe that their place in the city is not some arbitrary function of history, but reflects their true nature crafted by the gods. The hope is that this justification for the class system will reduce the likelihood of citizens questioning the political structure of the city and resenting individuals from different classes. As Bloom (1991, 366–367) explains:

> Fathers are not inclined to see their sons deprived of their birthright. And it is not easy to make men without virtues see and accept their inferiority and give up hopes of rising … The [noble] lie provides a basis for a satisfactory solution, giving the hierarchy solidity while at the same time presenting men with a rationale designed to overcome their primitive inclination to value themselves at least as highly as their neighbors.

Similar to the unifying aspect, the separating aspect of the noble lie has two levels. On the mythical level, the separating aspect teaches the citizens that they have metal in their soul corresponding to their natural abilities, which are suited towards certain tasks. On the ethical level, the separating aspect teaches the citizens that they should do the tasks assigned to their class and that they shouldn't interfere in the activities of the other classes.

From this, one sees that the myth not only directs correct action, but also shapes the character of the citizens. Through their beneficence, individuals will develop the appropriate feelings and thoughts towards their fellow citizens and their own position in the city.[12] The development of these things will allow all citizens to grasp (at least indirectly) important truths about unity, harmony, and oneness. Someone living in the city, for instance, will come to recognize that goodness is not simplemindedly pursing one's own good or doing whatever one wants, but involves recognizing and appreciating the good of the Whole and seeing one's place in the Whole. Hence, a type of genuine moral progress is facilitated by an initial deception, and this flouting of epistemic norms is justified by the movement towards ethical virtue.

3.5 Justified Lying and Ethical Commitments

Before closing this chapter, we must address an important objection. We have argued that the compatibility thesis is false within a Platonic context because of the premium that Plato places on deep commitments to normative objects such as justice. But Plato also clearly advocates for a deep commitment to truth. Indeed, the philosopher rulers are explicitly taught to love all truth and hate all falsehood (5.474b–475c, 6.485c–d, and 6.490a–c). If someone who values justice for its own sake could not rationally endorse the acts committed by Gyges, how could someone who genuinely values truth rationally endorse the use of deception? Wouldn't both be instances of rejecting the norms that are central to the normative objects in question?

This objection is not as damning as it might seem as long as we keep in mind that we are not operating within a deontological framework but a eudaimonist one. In the eudaimonist framework, a commitment to truthfulness doesn't preclude reflectively endorsing a lie. To illustrate this, consider an example inspired by Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.[13] After having abandoned a wounded and suffering (and now lonely and uncivilized) Philoctetes, the Greeks now need him and his powerful bow in order to conquer Troy. The Greeks can't force Philoctetes to return (since he has a powerful bow), nor will they be able to convince him (since they betrayed him)—deception is the only means for achieving victory. The wily and utilitarian-minded Odysseus recruits honest and noble Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, to trick Philoctetes into returning. At first, Neoptolemus balks at the idea of deception, but with the promise of victory and eternal renown, he agrees "to put his shame aside" (120) and to deceive Philoctetes. Upon meeting and befriending Philoctetes, Neoptolemus comes to sympathize with him and to regret agreeing to deceive him for personal glory. However, Neoptolemus soon recognizes that the deception will benefit not only the Greeks but also Philoctetes: isolation has blinded Philoctetes from seeing important social truths;

thus, by returning to civilization and sharing in fellowship, these truths will be uncovered for Philoctetes. Neoptolemus rationally judges that he should deceive his new friend. Although this decision pains him, he holds that ultimately there is no shame in helping friends, and this is the only way to do so (1380–1385).

Given Odysseus' unbidden willingness to lie and to be whatever kind of man he has to be in order to win (1047–1053), he can't be said to value veracity for its own sake—deception comes far too easily for him. Nonetheless, it is possible for Neoptolemus to value veracity for its own sake, even though he (in our version of the story) rationally endorses deceiving his friend. This is because this lie is motivated by love for his friend and concern for the greater good (of the Greeks), and the act still causes him some degree of distress and a sense of violating his own nature.

With this in mind, let us take a closer look at the philosophers' use of deception. Consider first the explanation for lying in the Kallipolis being restricted to philosopher-rulers. In Book 3, Plato asserts that just as only doctors should prescribe drugs, only the philosopher-rulers should tell lies in the city:

> Moreover, we have to be concerned about truth as well, for if what we said just now is correct, and falsehood [*pseudos*], though of no use to the gods, is useful to people in the form of a drug, clearly we must allow only doctors to use it, not private citizens … Then if it is appropriate for anyone to lie [*pseudesthai*] for the good of the city, because of the actions of either enemies or citizens, it is the rulers.
>
> (389b2–10)

Plato's point is that doctors know things about medicine and health that non-doctors do not know, and because of this, doctors have a much higher rate of healing patients than non-doctors do. This is why doctors should issue prescriptions and non-doctors should defer to the opinion of medical experts with respect to health (389c). When Socrates says that useful lies must be assigned to doctors, he is speaking metaphorically. The philosopher-rulers serve as "doctors" for the city and its citizens; they know things about goodness and governing that non-philosophers do not know, and because of this knowledge philosopher-rulers are more successful at ruling than non-philosophers are. Philosophers' political expertise includes knowing when it is best to lie, and because of this, they are permitted to lie. Since non-philosophers lack this knowledge, they are not permitted to lie. Therefore, it is the philosopher's superior epistemic vantage point that grounds her authority to prescribe falsehood, and it is the non-philosopher's epistemically deficient vantage point that disqualifies her as an authority to prescribe falsehood.

To highlight the dangers of non-philosophers lying to philosophers, Socrates extends his medical analogy (389c). Suppose, for instance, that

a patient lies to a doctor about the present condition of her health. This faulty information will lead the doctor to misdiagnose and mistreat the patient's disease. Consequently, the disease will not be cured and the doctor's prescription might actually harm the patient. Likewise, if a non-philosopher lies to a philosopher about her present condition or the condition of the city, the philosopher will likely misjudge the non-philosopher's needs as well as the needs of the city. This faulty information will cause the philosopher to issue the wrong prescriptions and the entire city will be harmed as a result.

Plato would be making a very bad argument if his point were that under no circumstance could a lie told by a non-philosopher be beneficial. After all, nothing in his response to Cephalus suggests that the instruction to withhold the truth from those who are insane applies only to philosophers (1.331b–d). Accordingly, there might be some particular circumstances in which non-philosophers could receive some immediate benefit from lying. However, on the whole, this practice is hazardous because non-philosophers are likely to misjudge when it is appropriate to lie. This danger is especially severe because, unlike philosophers, non-philosophers have not been raised to hate falsehood and love truth. Thus, if non-philosophers are permitted to lie, they might do so without restraint. In contrast, because philosophers love truth and hate falsehood they will only lie when it is truly beneficial. From this, we derive the following principle:

> Justified Lying Principle: Individual *A* can justifiably lie to individual *B* if *A* occupies a sufficiently superior epistemic and moral vantage point in relation to *B*, and *A* has strong reasons to believe that the lie will benefit *B*.

This principle helps us see the important disanalogy between endorsing Gyges' actions and endorsing the occasional useful lie. The lies that are permitted according to the principle are not told for the sake of promoting falsehood or advancing self-interest. They are told, rather, for the sake of promoting justice within individuals and the city, which is ultimately conducive to the ideal of truthfulness in the long run. In the case of Gyges, the acts in question were performed for the sake of the very sorts of considerations which justice precludes from having justificatory weight (i.e. personal financial and political gain). Moreover, the justified lying principle is formulated in a way that restricts the use of falsehood as much as possible while still allowing for some useful lies. An agent who tells an untruth under the guidance of this principle can still be said to genuinely love truth for its own sake (see Weiss 2001, 11). Indeed, it is the philosophers' love of truth that permits them to lie (see Annas 1981, 107–108, 166–167; Brickhouse and Smith 1983, 84; and Schofield 2007, 148). Lies do not roll off the tongue of a philosopher as they do for

Odysseus—like noble Neoptolemus, a philosopher is pained and troubled by lies, but judges that they are sometimes necessary.

3.6 Summary

Our aim in this chapter has been to further clarify the nature of Platonic ethical commitments and the role that they play within Plato's Pragmatism. By considering the commitments involved in valuing justice for its own sake, we have seen that Glaucon's challenge is more formidable than is often presumed. More importantly, we have seen that choosing to pursue justice as part of one's own good involves more than the performance of right actions or a mere preference for just outcomes. Although Plato believes that falsehoods can be justified when they facilitate good conduct, the ultimate goal is not actions and their immediate consequences, but rather the cultivation of good character over time. Having good character means having a harmonious psychology that includes a deep commitment to ideals such as justice. And while one ought also to be committed to veracity and sound epistemic practices, the relevant norms do not involve a categorical prohibition against lying—they allow for deceptions that are conducive to virtue, justice, and propagation of the most important truths.

This concludes Part I. We take ourselves to have established that the Absolutist Evaluative Claim is mistaken. As we demonstrated in Chapters 1 and 2, Plato clearly thinks that falsehoods, in the form of both deception and false belief, are sometimes preferable to truth. As we explained in this chapter, for a lie to be justified, it must be told from someone in a sufficiently superior epistemic and moral vantage point, and such a person must have strong reasons to believe that the lie will benefit the deceived. Falsehoods are most useful when they help to cultivate correct ethical commitments that are entrenched and unwavering. We shall now turn our attention to the Epistemic Caution Claim. Does Plato's view permit us to take epistemic risks? Or must we always be careful to avoid causing ourselves to believe in the absence of sufficient evidence?

Notes

1 As B. Williams (2006, Chaps. 6 and 8) forcefully argues, the challenge isn't to show that justice has non-relational or independent value as opposed to relational or dependent value; instead, the challenge is to show that it is rational to value justice as an end in itself rather than as a mere means.
2 Shields' clearest endorsement of the compatibility thesis occurs in the context of his discussion of the choice of lives. However, the basic point is equally pertinent to the Gyges argument, and it appears to underlie Shields' critique of that argument as well (2006, 76–77).
3 Reeve (1988, 283n19–20) raises a related concern: "We might wonder, then, why Glaucon wants Socrates to show that justice is desirable for its own sake.

Could it not be more choiceworthy than injustice simply by having more desirable G-consequences [i.e. associated but non-essential goods]?"

4 Although the division of goods is a source of interpretive controversy, we shall focus primarily on exploring the rational commitments involved in valuing justice for its own sake. Investigation of this issue doesn't require taking a stance on whether intrinsic valuing means "independently of consequences" (1995, 181–193; Kirwan 1965; Mabbott 1978; Reeve 1988, 282n19; Irwin 1999; B. Williams 2006, Chaps. 6 and 8; Weiss 2007, 106; and Jones 2019) or "because of the attached (rather than ancillary) consequences" (Foster 1937; Sachs 1963, 145n9, 148n14; Annas 1981, Chap. 3; White 1984; Pappas 1995, 51–55; Heinaman 2002; Payne 2011; and Anderson 2020).

5 Glaucon's prefatory remarks also suggest an alternative reading of the "in every way" (*panti tropōi*) clause (2.357a–b). Whereas Irwin believes *panti tropōi* means "in every possible circumstance," it is at least as plausible that Glaucon is asking whether justice is more valuable than injustice both intrinsically and instrumentally. If this is the correct reading, Irwin's account of the philosophical purpose of the Gyges story fails (see Jones 2019, 168n10).

6 We have invented this label simply for ease of reference. Some examples of normative objects include justice, racial equality, integrity, compassion, the "golden rule," Kant's "categorical imperative," Sidgwick's "principle of rational benevolence," Mill's "harm principle," etc. In referring to ethical principles, moral ideals, and virtues as normative objects, we do not mean to take on any ontological commitments. Further, although Plato doesn't use some of the terms we rely on in our analysis (which are borrowed from contemporary ethical theory), the considerations we raise in this section provide strong grounds for believing that the general concepts expressed with these terms play an important role in Plato's thinking.

7 The limiting requirement might be expressed more simply by substituting "self-interest" in place of "effective goods." We have chosen not to use "self-interest" so as to remain neutral concerning the possibility that justice always coheres with one's *true* self-interest (as opposed to mere hedonic, financial, or political self-interest). The label "effective goods" is inspired by Alasdair MacIntyre's (1988, 32, 35) useful distinction between "goods of effectiveness" and "goods of excellence." Whereas the former includes things such as wealth and social power, the latter includes the excellences intrinsic to particular sorts of activities.

8 Common sense seems to suggest that giving *some* degree of priority to self-interest is compatible with justice, though it is not clear how much. Some of Plato's remarks might be read as suggesting that justice requires complete impartiality (4.420b and 6.500d), though this is controversial. For present purposes, it is not necessary to take a stand on this issue. It is enough to note that most everyone, including Glaucon and Socrates, would agree that Gyges gave his own interests substantially more weight than justice permits. For helpful discussion of the relationships among justice, self-interest, and impartiality in the *Republic*, see White (2002, ch. 5); Irwin (2004); E. Brown (2004); Weiss (2007); and L. Brown (2007). For a similar discussion with respect to Stoic eudaimonism and impartialism, see McCabe (2013).

9 By "disregard" we do not mean merely failing to take the interest of others into account. The idea is rather that the agent is willing to cause or allow substantial harm to innocent people whenever doing so will lead to financial or political gain. Thus, a person who fully acknowledges that her actions and omissions negatively affect others but doesn't care about this fact, disregards the interests of others in the relevant sense. Note also that judgment

B references "*utter* disregard for the interests of others" because the relative evaluation involves the extreme acts committed by Gyges. We are not claiming that all unjust acts involve utter disregard for the interests of others for the sake of personal profit. Rather, we are claiming that all acts involving utter disregard for the interests of others for the sake of personal profit are unjust.

10 In emphasizing the eudaimonist framework, we are not attributing to Plato the belief that it could be rational for a person to be just only to the extent that it promotes her well-being. There are reasons for thinking that Plato recognizes the possibility of genuine conflicts between pursuit of justice and pursuit of one's overall flourishing (for instructive debate on this point see White 2002 and Irwin 2004; see also Schuh 2019). Our contention regarding the eudaimonist framework is only that the axiological debate over justice in Book 2 is not about mere states of affairs (i.e. without special focus on one's own agency), but rather the incorporation of a commitment to justice in one's own life (see B. Williams 2006, Chaps. 6 and 8).

11 If Glaucon succeeds in showing that nobody values justice for its own sake at all, it follows that nobody views justice as a non-instrumental good to be chosen in every possible circumstance. Thus, our analysis is compatible with Irwin's claim that *panti tropōi* at 357a–b means "in every possible circumstance." Our endorsement of Gyges' actions shows that we do not value justice for its own sake *and* that we do not view justice as something to be chosen in every possible circumstance.

12 Compare Kant's take on the biblical injunction to love your neighbor as yourself: "It means … *do good* to your fellow human beings, and your beneficence will produce love of them in you (as an aptitude of the inclination to beneficence in general)" (MM 6:402).

13 We say "inspired" because we are deviating from the story by having Neoptolemus clearly accept that the deception was necessary and for the best.

Part II

Courage, Caution, and Faith

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4 Charming Away the Fear of Death in the *Phaedo*

> When it's time to leave the sun and moon behind, how will you react? Will you sit down and cry, like an infant? Did nothing that you heard and studied in school get through to you? Why did you advertise yourself as a philosopher when you might have told the truth: "I made it through a couple of primers, then read a little Chrysippus—but I hardly crossed the threshold of philosophy." How can you associate yourself with Socrates, who lived and died as he did, or with Diogenes? You cannot imagine either of them reduced to tears or tantrums because they weren't going to see this man, or that woman, or because they had to be in Susa, say, or Ecbatana, rather than Athens or Corinth.
>
> (Epictetus, *Disc*. 2.16.33–36)

We have seen in Part I that the Absolutist Evaluative Claim is false. There are circumstances in which falsehood is preferable to truth because the former is more conducive to cultivating the right ethical commitments. This raises the question of how this more permissive attitude towards falsehood should affect the belief-formation process. According to the second core claim of the Alethic Interpretation—the Epistemic Caution Claim—Plato holds that we ought never to form beliefs in the absence of strong evidence. The aim of Part II is to challenge this claim and develop a more nuanced picture of Plato's norms of belief.

Our case against the Epistemic Caution Claim begins with the *Phaedo*. In this dialogue, Socrates suggests that he will try to convince himself that his soul is immortal and destined for a better place, regardless of whether there is adequate evidence for these claims. He indicates that he is willing to take this epistemic risk because of the practical benefits of these beliefs (91a–b). However, Socrates also tells Cebes and Simmias to continue pursuing the truth about these very same matters (91c). This raises the question of why Socrates would advise Cebes and Simmias to adhere to the aim of avoiding falsehood about death while he himself deliberately sets this aim aside. This is

especially puzzling since, presumably, the beliefs about the afterlife would have the same practical benefits for Cebes and Simmias as they do for Socrates. Further, Socrates' willingness to risk falsehood seems in tension with his general commitment to sound epistemic practices. The goal of this chapter is to resolve this interpretive puzzle, which we label the "*Phaedo* anomaly," as a means of contributing to the broader aims of Part II mentioned above.

We will argue that three interrelated factors explain why Socrates is justified in taking this epistemic risk but his friends are not. Socrates' proximity to death, his philosophical acumen, and his leadership position combine to explain why what is appropriate for him at this moment is not appropriate for his friends. Given his influence, Socrates' ability to face death in a noble and fearless manner (which is facilitated by the beliefs in question) is far more important than the goal of avoiding falsehood. Additionally, Socrates' philosophical skills allow him to navigate the epistemic risks with grace. Hence, even for someone as philosophical as Socrates, the aim of avoiding falsehood occasionally takes a back seat to the broader aim of living (and dying) virtuously.

4.1 The *Phaedo* Anomaly

Throughout the *Phaedo*, Socrates maintains that he has striven in every way to become a philosopher (69d; cf. 60d–61b), which involves a commitment to truth, knowledge, and wisdom (e.g. 66a–e, 84a, and 91a). Nevertheless, at 91a–b, Socrates says some curious things that raise questions about his dedication to truth.

Socrates has just offered three arguments in defense of the immortality of the soul: the cyclical argument (70c–72e), the argument from recollection (72e–78b), and the affinity argument (78b–80d). Following this, he offers a mythical description of the afterlife in which the quality is proportional to the ethical quality of one's time on earth: those who have lived wickedly will experience the worst afterlife, while those who have lived philosophically will experience the best afterlife (80d–84b; see also 107c–115a). Call this idea the "proportionality thesis."[1]

Cebes and Simmias are unconvinced by Socrates' defense of the soul's immortality, but they are reluctant to object because they worry about distressing him (84d). Socrates, however, encourages them to offer their objections (84d–85b). After hearing their criticisms, Socrates warns them about the dangers of misology—the hatred of rational discourse and thought.[2] According to Socrates, misology arises in a similar way to misanthropy. Misanthropy develops from a lack of skill in dealing with humans; it arises when one trusts humans when one shouldn't. Eventually, such a trusting person will be deceived in hurtful ways and will conclude from this that all humans are wretched. This is regrettable because most people are decent and few are deplorable (89d–e).

Misology arises in a similar manner. Without skill in reasoning, one will unjustifiably trust arguments, and such trust will lead one to waver between contradictory positions. Eventually, one will become frustrated and fall into absolute skepticism, thinking that there is no sound position whatsoever (90b–d). Hating rational inquiry is lamentable because it deprives one of "truth and knowledge of reality [*tōn ontōn*]" (90d6–7). To overcome the dangers of misology, Socrates advises his friends that, rather than thinking that there is something generally unsound about arguments or theories, they should believe that it is they themselves who are unsound, and that they must "take courage and be eager to attain soundness" (90e3).

Immediately following this, Socrates says some curious things about his present state of mind:

> I am in danger at this moment of not being philosophical towards this very thing [i.e. death], and of being like those who are quite uneducated [*hoi panu apaideutoi*], as a lover of winning [*philonikōs*]. For whenever they dispute about something, they give no thought to the truth about the subject of discussion but are only eager that those present will accept the position they have set forth. And it seems to me that in this present moment I shall differ from them *only to this extent*: I shall not be eager that what I say seems true to those who are present, except incidentally, but rather I shall be very eager that it seems so to myself.
>
> (91a1–b1, emphasis added; cf. *Resp*. 5.450e–451a)[3]

In a few lines, Socrates has identified four ways of being unphilosophical. The first deals with arguments without skill (i.e. the cause of misology). The second is hating rational inquiry altogether (i.e. misology). The third is trying to convince others of claims without caring about whether or not these claims are actually true (i.e. being a lover of winning or an eristic).[4] The fourth is trying to convince oneself of certain claims without caring for whether or not they are actually true (i.e. being a self-directed eristic).

Notice that the first two ways of being unphilosophical develop from a lack of skill with arguments but not necessarily from indifference to truth. Someone might care greatly about truth but lack the skills needed to understand arguments, and his lack of skill might lead him to get so frustrated that he abandons rational inquiry altogether. In contrast, the latter two ways of being unphilosophical do not necessarily develop from a lack of skill with rational inquiry but instead from placing little value on truth (at least in the particular circumstance one faces). This seems to be why in Book 7 of the *Republic* Socrates is concerned about teaching young guardians dialectic: the worry is that they will develop skills in argumentation before they develop a firm and

stable love of truth. In turn, they will become eager to win arguments without caring about whether or not the position they are defending is true (539b). Despite these differences, all four of these unphilosophical states share the common feature that they are epistemically vicious and threaten the possibility of obtaining truth and knowledge. By "epistemically vicious," we mean a process that commonly or likely results in falsehood, such as believing on the basis of little evidence or motivated reasoning.

After noting that he is running the risk of being unphilosophical, Socrates asserts that from this moment he will adopt the position of a self-directed eristic who is eager to convince himself of certain things regardless of whether or not they are true.[5] Socrates goes on to explain why he is adopting such a position:

> For I calculate, my friends—see how greedily [*pleonektikōs*] I calculate!—that if what I say is true, it is a fine thing to be convinced; if, on the other hand, nothing exists after death, at least for this time before I die I shall distress those present less with lamentations and my ignorance [*anoia*] will not continue to exist along with me—that would be a bad thing—but will come to an end in a short time.
>
> (91b1–7)

Socrates is greedily clinging to the idea that his soul is immortal and destined for a good afterlife because he benefits from believing these claims whether or not they are true (see Rowe 1993, 215–216). These practical beliefs benefit him by preventing intense fear and sorrow: in their extreme form, these two negative emotions are inappropriate and dangerous for an adult, let alone a philosopher of Socrates' stature (58d–59b, 65e–69d, 77e–78a, 81b–84b, and 117c–e; see also *Resp*. 3.386a–390d and 10.603c–608b). Socrates' acceptance of these practical beliefs, in turn, benefits his friends: by maintaining his equipoise through these practical beliefs, he distresses his friends less.

The idea that positive beliefs about the afterlife will reduce the fear of death accords with Socrates' earlier claim that, if he did not believe that he would meet wise and good gods as well as better men in the afterlife, he would "be wrong not to resent dying" (ἠδίκουν ἂν οὐκ ἀγανακτῶν τῷ θανάτῳ) (63b9; see also 68b–c, 84b, and 88b–c).[6] Moreover, even if these beliefs are false, Socrates' ignorance will not remain with him long but will cease upon death. On the other hand, if he believes these claims and these claims are true, not only does he receive the practical benefits already mentioned, but he also receives the epistemic benefits of having true beliefs about something important, namely, the nature of the soul and afterlife.

The table is an overview of Socrates' calculation.[7]

Socrates' Beliefs	*Epistemic Value*	*Practical Value*
S believes claims about death, and the claims are true.	High benefit (true belief that will extend into the afterlife).	High benefit (belief assuages the fear of death).
S believes claims about death, and the claims are false.	Moderate cost (false belief, but only for a short duration).	High benefit (belief assuages the fear of death).

Immediately after Socrates seems to defend the merits of being a self-directed eristic, he encourages his friends to seek the truth like philosophers:

> If you take my advice, you will give but little thought to Socrates but much more to the truth. If you think that what I say is true, agree with me; if not, oppose it with every argument and take care that in my eagerness I don't deceive [*exapatēsas*] myself and you, and like a bee, leave my sting in you when I go.
>
> (91c1–6; see also 107b and 115b–c)

Socrates seems to be saying some rather uncharacteristic things in these passages, and because of this, one might be tempted to resist interpreting him as a self-directed eristic. One might argue either that Socrates is merely being ironic, or that he is simply acknowledging that he is in danger of acting unphilosophically.[8] However, there are subtle hints scattered throughout the *Phaedo* suggesting that Socrates is not being his usual philosophical self.[9] Two passages in particular highlight this.

The first hint that he is pursuing "unphilosophical" or "non-rational" methods comes at the beginning of the *Phaedo*, where Socrates says he has been practicing poetry (60b–61b). This comes as a great surprise to everyone, since Socrates has never written poetry before (60d). Socrates explains that he has been pursuing poetry as a backup plan in case the gods really wanted him to practice poetry instead of philosophy (60d–61b).[10]

Second, after Socrates responds to his friends' objections, he describes the cosmos and afterlife in the form of a myth (107c–115a). The myth includes both the particular details of the physical structures of the world and cosmos, as well as a detailed description of the afterlife, which includes a restatement of the proportionality thesis. Socrates concludes the myth by saying that "because of the things we have enumerated, one must make every effort to share in virtue and wisdom in one's life, for the reward is beautiful and the hope is great" (114c6–9).

Following this, Socrates says:

> It is not fitting for a man having intelligence [οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρί] to insist that these things are as I have described them, but

> I think it is fitting and worthy for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like it, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul appears to be immortal [ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα], and a person should sing this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale.
>
> (114d1–8; see also 77e–78a; *Ti.* 29c–d)

Here Socrates is advocating the use of "non-rational methods" in order to motivate the belief in certain things about "souls and their dwelling place." Because there is insufficient evidence for these claims, believing them is risky. Nevertheless, "it is fitting and worthy for a man to risk the belief" because of its practical value.[11]

These two passages provide compelling reasons to take Socrates at his word and to interpret him as actually being a self-directed eristic: he is attempting to persuade himself of certain claims irrespective of their truth value.[12] This leads to the question: why does Socrates think that he is justified in unphilosophically clinging to certain claims about the soul and death, but that his friends should continue impartially pursuing the truth regarding those very same claims? What makes this even more puzzling is that presumably his friends stand to reap the same practical benefits from these beliefs. For instance, if his friends believe in the immortality of the soul and the proportionality thesis, then they will experience less sadness and pain in response to Socrates' death. Further, such beliefs will allow them to continue in the footsteps of Socrates—fearlessly pursuing philosophy even if it leads to death—which is what he wants them to do.

Thus, Socrates seems to have backed himself into a dilemma in which either (a) his epistemically greedy attitude is unjustified, in which case it is right for him to advise his friends to seek the truth and wrong for him not to; or (b) his attitude is justified, in which case it is wrong for him to advise his friends to seek the truth and right for him not to. The first prong makes Socrates look psychologically unstable or cowardly, while the second prong makes him a bad teacher and leader of his friends.

4.2 "The Best of Men"

What is the relevant difference between Socrates and his friends such that he is justified in behaving like a self-directed eristic towards issues concerning death, while his friends are not? The most obvious difference is the proximity to death. This is relevant for two main reasons. First, the potential epistemic costs appear greater for Simmias and Cebes: if they adopt these beliefs and practice being self-directed eristics, they risk not only falsehood but also ongoing epistemic vice. Given Socrates' imminent death, he seemingly bears less risk (91b). Second, although it is challenging for Simmias and Cebes to handle seeing Socrates' die, it is reasonably

within their power to accept this gracefully without having to engage in wishful thinking. It is much more difficult for an individual facing his own death to do so in a virtuous manner, especially if the option of avoiding death (at the cost of one's integrity) is available. As the Athenian Stranger explains in the *Laws*, "most of us just go to pieces and can't think straight when we think death is at hand" (11.922c3–5; see also *Resp*. 1.330d–331a).

While these considerations pertaining to Socrates' proximity to death are part of the explanation for why his friends aren't equally justified in being unphilosophical in this context, there is likely more to the story. For while the longer future of Cebes and Simmias means that the beliefs in question could have greater epistemic costs for them, more time on earth could also bring substantial practical benefits from the risky beliefs. For instance, belief in the soul's immortality and the proportionality thesis will positively shape the rest of their lives, as it will encourage them to care for the condition of their souls and not to care about money, honor, or the things of the body (e.g. 61b–d, 63e–64e, 66a–e, 68b–c, 107c–d, and 114c). One might have thought that such benefits could justify the epistemic risks. Further, even for someone whose death is imminent, being unphilosophical still represents a danger. If there is an afterlife, then the negative effects from epistemically vicious practices carry over into the great beyond (*Grg*. 524b–525a). So even if Socrates is right about the soul's immortality, the fact that he formed this belief without adequate evidence could still cause damage to him.[13] And so, it is not clear that the difference in proximity to death is enough to fully explain why Socrates doesn't want his friends to share his unphilosophical approach to this matter.

We contend that another relevant difference between Socrates and his friends is that he is a more fully accomplished philosopher than they are. He is an expert at pursuing truth, knowledge, and wisdom (e.g. 61b–d, 63e–64a, 66a–68b, 69b, 84a, 91a, and 118a), and because of this, he is an "epistemic authority." As we will soon explain, Socrates' high level of epistemic skill enables him to occasionally violate epistemic norms without taking on as much risk as others would.

Before elaborating on this point further we must address a preliminary worry. Our description of Socrates as an epistemic authority is likely to raise red flags among some scholars because he famously disavows knowledge (*Ap*. 21d).[14] Accordingly, one might think that in calling Socrates an epistemic authority we are committed to him feigning ignorance. However, our reading commits us to no such thing and we believe that it is in line with most readers' conception of him.

In explicating these points, we would do well to start with a point of agreement. We can all agree that Socrates is special: he is morally and intellectual superior to the other characters. Indeed, we find evidence that he is aware of this. For example, in the *Apology* he says that he is wiser

than other people are in that he knows his own ignorance (21d and 29b). In the *Gorgias*, he says that he is the only one who takes up the true political craft and practices true politics (521d; see Shaw 2011). Accepting this claim doesn't commit one to the strong view that he has robust knowledge, but only to the weak comparative claim that he is intellectually and morally superior to most others. Hence, he might not know the Good, but he has a better idea of it than others do, and he has a better grasp of how we should pursue it. Few scholars are skeptical of this weaker claim, but for those who are, they must explain why, if it isn't for his reasoning and character, Plato wants us to focus on him. Why does Plato have him lead and guide so many conversations, if it isn't for these qualities?[15]

Setting these worries aside, let's compare Simmias and Cebes to Socrates. Although Simmias and Cebes have a moderate level of philosophical skill and do, in fact, care about the truth, they lack the philosophical expertise of Socrates and thus are not epistemic authorities. Being an epistemic authority affords Socrates two advantages over his friends. First, he is a good judge of when it is to one's advantage to not pursue the truth. Second, because he has devoted his life to achieving truth and knowledge (69d), his epistemic dispositions are relatively stable. This means that there is less of a chance that being epistemically vicious at a given time will infect and destroy his skill as a philosopher, or his love for truth, knowledge, and wisdom.

However, because Simmias and Cebes lack the same degree of philosophical skill, when they act in an epistemically vicious manner, they risk becoming habitual wishful thinkers, or worse yet, completely self-deceived. This danger is very real. Without Socrates' philosophical prodding, his friends seriously risk falling deep into the unphilosophical life of valuing bodily goods over the goods of the soul (76b, 78a, and 89c). Relatedly, unphilosophically clinging to the immortality of the soul before they are properly equipped to defend this claim puts Simmias and Cebes at risk of misology. Lacking sufficient philosophical ability and epistemic justification for this claim, Simmias and Cebes will, in all likelihood, be refuted, and without Socrates' encouragement, this may cause them intellectual despair.[16]

Thus, despite the fact that Simmias and Cebes might receive some immediate practical benefits from being unphilosophical towards the claim that the soul is immortal, in the end, they will be better off being philosophical towards it—for philosophy is the best general guide to one's life. This is why Socrates wants to avoid leaving his unphilosophical "sting" in them when he dies (91c; see also 107b and115b–c). Therefore, part of Socrates' justification for risking falsehood in this context is that he is an epistemic authority. Since Simmias and Cebes are still early in their philosophical development, they should more rigidly adhere to sound epistemic practices when examining the nature of the soul so that they can mitigate against wishful thinking and misology.[17]

This second element of our interpretation is based on the idea that one's epistemic skill, in part, determines whether an epistemic risk is appropriate or not. The more epistemic skill one has, the more risk it is appropriate to take. This is an application of a general principle which we call "skill-based risk assessment" (SBRA):

> SBRA: Agent *A*'s skill in a given field *F*, in part, determines whether a risk is appropriate or not for *A* with respect to *F*. The more skill *A* has in *F*, the more risk it is appropriate for *A* to take with respect to *F*. The less skill *A* has in *F*, the less risk it is appropriate for *A* to take with respect to *F*.

Not only does SBRA have intuitive appeal, there is textual evidence that it motivated Socrates' position. As a preliminary point, we would like to highlight that SBRA is an application of thinking of virtue as a craft, which is clearly a Socratic commitment (*Ap*. 20a–c; *La*. 185d–e, 192d–193d, 195a–c; *Resp*. 1.332d–334c, 1.341c–343a; *Chrm*. 165c–175d; *Euthyd*. 291b–292d; and *Grg*. 460b). We see SBRA vividly in the *Protagoras* when Socrates says that it is in virtue of one's craft knowledge that one is justified in acting boldly with respect to one's craft. Those who act boldly with respect to a craft that they are ignorant of are out of their minds (350a–c). Accordingly, it is in virtue of one's epistemic state that one is justified in taking more risk with respect to the craft of forming beliefs.

The aforementioned example shows evidence of Socrates' utilizing SBRA with respect to specific crafts. However, if we are right about SBRA being applied in the *Phaedo*, it is not applied to ordinary crafts but rather to the general belief-formation process. We have already encountered two pieces of textual evidence supporting the claim that Socrates applies SBRA to belief formation. In Chapter 2, we discussed the river-fording passage in the *Laws*:

> Suppose we three had to cross a rapidly flowing river, and I, who happened to be the youngest of us and experienced with many currents, said, "I ought to try first on my own account and leave you two in safety while I see if the river is fordable for you two older men as well, or if not, just how bad it is. If it turns out to be fordable, I'll then call you and put my experience at your disposal in helping you to cross; but, if in the event it cannot be crossed by old men like yourselves, then the only risk has been mine." … The situation is the same now: the argument ahead runs too deep, and men as weak as you will probably get out of your depth. I want to prevent you novices in answering from being dazed and dizzied by a stream of questions, which would put you in an undignified and humiliating position you'd find most unpleasant.
>
> (10.892d6–893a2)

In this passage, the Athenian Stranger is saying that just as someone who is more experienced and stronger should ford a river to see if it is safe, someone who is more experienced with arguments and intellectually superior should examine the merits of an argument before a novice. This is similar to the position we are attributing to Socrates in the *Phaedo*. In both cases, one's epistemic abilities permit one to engage with arguments or beliefs in ways that would be dangerous for someone who lacked such abilities.

The justified lying principle, which we discussed in Chapter 3, is also quite similar to Socrates' position here. Recall that this principle holds that individual *A* can justifiably lie to individual *B* if *A* occupies a sufficiently superior epistemic and moral vantage point to *B*, and *A* has strong reasons to believe that the lie will benefit *B*. We explained that this principle underlies Plato's claim that only philosopher-rulers should be permitted to lie in the Kallipolis (3.389b). The justified lying principle is essentially an application of SBRA—lying is risky, but it is far less risky when done by someone who is intellectually and morally superior. Hence, because Socrates clearly accepts a version of SBRA involving lying in the *Republic*, it shouldn't be all that surprising that we find a similar version of it in the *Phaedo*.

Obviously, these examples are not perfectly analogous. According to our interpretation of the *Phaedo*, Socrates is working under the assumption that a philosopher's epistemic authority can provide justification for risking false belief in circumstances where a non-epistemic authority is not justified in risking false belief. However, in the *Republic* it is not the case that the epistemic ability of a philosopher justifies her in engaging in wishful thinking or motivated reasoning. Rather, her epistemic ability justifies her in lying to others. Nevertheless, both examples share the same general principle: one's epistemic and ethical ability justify one in doing something epistemically vicious, and one's lack of epistemic and ethical ability disqualifies her from doing something epistemically vicious. Additionally, Plato's conception of philosophers in the *Republic* is similar to his conception of philosophers in the *Phaedo*: in both dialogues philosophers love truth, knowledge, and wisdom, and they despise falsehood, wealth, and the things of the body (*Resp*. 3.416e–417a, 5.474b–475c, 6.485c–d, 6.490a–c, 6.501d, and 9.591d–e).

This leads to the third element of our solution to the "*Phaedo* anomaly," which is closely related to the points about proximity to death and epistemic authority. Cebes and Simmias are not in Socrates' position of being able to benefit others by fearlessly facing death (with the potential assistance of unjustified beliefs). Socrates' philosophical ability and character not only allow him to judge when it is appropriate to pursue or set aside certain considerations, but they also distinguish him from others in nobility, leadership, and influence. It is not an accident that the dialogue concludes with Phaedo describing Socrates as the best, wisest, and most

upright of men (118a). In addition to his immediate influence in Athens, Socrates has had a positive impact on the history of humanity that is difficult to overstate. His commitment to living virtuously, even in the face of an unjust death, has been a source of inspiration for countless philosophers, spiritual teachers, and political leaders from the ancient world to the present. As Epictetus remarks, "even now, long after Socrates' death, the memory of what he did and said benefits humanity as much or more than ever" (*Discourses* 4.1.169).[18]

In order to make this lasting contribution, it was crucial for Socrates to accept his punishment and participate in his execution in a dignified and optimistic manner, as depicted in Jacques Louis David's painting, *The Death of Socrates*. Socrates recognizes that, unlike his friends, he is in a unique position to vindicate the commitment to moral virtue and a philosophical life by refusing to flee, beg for mercy, or shed tears during his final moments. Such behaviors would have suggested an attachment to material existence and its attendant pleasures exceeding his attachments to justice, goodness, and the pursuit of wisdom. In contrast, drinking the hemlock without flinching signified a great triumph for philosophy. As Seneca remarks in one of his letters to Lucilius, "At the last came the climax of condemnation under the gravest of charges … Next came the prison, and the cup of poison. But all these measures changed the soul of Socrates so little that they did not even change his features. What wonderful and rare distinction!" (*Ep*. 104.28). Given everything that Socrates taught and stood for during his life, it was of paramount importance for him to face death nobly—the stakes couldn't have been higher. And it was (partly) these unique circumstances which, somewhat paradoxically, justify his relaxation of epistemic norms.

Before we continue, we need to clarify something that might be a source of confusion. Although we argue that one's epistemic ability and potential influence justify one risking more epistemic vice, we don't mean to suggest that under no condition could it be rational for a foolish person to engage in epistemic vice. As we explained in Chapter 3, Plato's ethical project centers on ethical commitments. Actions, outcomes, and rules matter in his theory, but they matter in a derivative or secondary sense. In contemporary ethical theory, it is often argued that virtue ethics is non-codifiable; that is, there is no exhaustive list of rules or codes that can explain how one should act in every scenario (see McDowell 1979 and Hursthouse 1999). As one will see throughout Part II, the epistemic norms Plato develops are complex, and what we propose here doesn't exhaust all of the norms and their conditions. That being said, non-philosophers need to be more stringent in their adherence to sound epistemic practices given that they do not yet have firm and stable commitments and are still developing the practical wisdom required to recognize when deviation from these practices is for the best.[19]

4.3 The *Phaedo* Anomaly Redux

In the previous section, we argued that the "*Phaedo* anomaly" is explained away by focusing on relevant facts about one's character and one's situation. However, a difficulty emerges for our interpretation in a passage near the end of the dialogue:

> It is not fitting for a man having intelligence [οὐ πρέπει νοῦν ἔχοντι ἀνδρί] to insist that these things are as I have described them, but I think it is fitting and worthy for a man to risk the belief—for the risk is a noble one—that this, or something like it, is true about our souls and their dwelling places, since the soul appears to be immortal [ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα], and a person should sing this to himself as if it were an incantation, which is why I have been prolonging my tale.
>
> (114d1–8)

At first glance, one might think that Socrates is being inconsistent, since at 114d he is asserting that *everyone* should try to believe certain claims about death irrespective of the truth, while at 91a–c he defends this practice only for himself. However, an inconsistency occurs only if the characters, context, and recommendation are the same in both passages, but this is not the case.

To begin, let us compare the contexts of these passages. Before Socrates' statement at 91a–c, the emotions and attitudes of his friends have been fluctuating and uncertain. Cebes and Simmias, for instance, are skeptical about Socrates' initial endorsement of the immortality of the soul, but they worry about how their objections will affect him (84d). After hearing Cebes' and Simmias' objections, the whole audience falls into dismay. Phaedo explains:

> When we heard what they said we were all depressed, as we told each other afterwards. We had been quite convinced by the previous argument, and they seemed to confuse us again, and to drive us to doubt not only what had already been said but also what was going to be said, lest we be worthless as critics or the subject itself admitted of no certainty.
>
> (88c1–7; see also Echecrates' response, 88c–e)

It is within this context that Socrates issues his warning about misology.

Socrates' misology warning addresses the audience's present state in two ways. First, he is dismissing their conjecture that there is no fact of the matter about these issues or that progress can't be made on this front. Instead of thinking that the problems are a result of the subject matter, we should think that the problem lies with us—we need to improve our

effort and strategy (90d–e). Second, misology arises when people lack sufficient discernment and accept claims too quickly. This leads to dramatic shifts in emotions as one's beloved argument appears potent in one moment, anemic the next. Socrates diagnoses this condition in his friends and cautions them against it. His statement at 91a–b is a continuation of these two claims. He is essentially saying to his friends that they need to cool their emotions, pursue these issues with some skepticism, and continue to question and reason.

The situation at 114d is different, however. To begin, Cebes' and Simmias' epistemic relationship to the arguments in favor of the immortality of the soul has changed. Both have taken Socrates' advice and continued to give and exchange reasons in a tranquil way. At this point, both Cebes and Simmias are persuaded that Socrates' account is more plausible than their competing accounts. Consider the following exchange between Socrates and Simmias.

> SIM.: I myself have no remaining grounds for doubt after what has been said; nevertheless, in view of the importance of our subject and my low opinion of human weakness, I am bound still to have some private misgivings about what we have said.
> SOC.: You are not only right to say this, Simmias, but our first hypotheses require clearer examination, even though we find them convincing. And if you analyze them adequately, you will, I think, follow the argument as far as a human can, and if the conclusion is clear, you will look no further.
> SIM.: That is true. (107a8–b10)

Simmias is following Socrates' earlier advice about being cautious and avoiding the trappings of relativism when one experiences uncertainty. Instead of attributing the cause of his private uncertainty to the indeterminacy of the facts, Simmias locates it in his deficient epistemic state and the significance of the subject matter—this was Socrates' advice.

It is in this context that Socrates tells a myth about the nature of the afterlife. Because Simmias and Cebes already accept that the immortality of the soul is a plausible thesis, it is fitting for Socrates to provide them with an account of the afterlife. The myth includes some details of the afterlife and defends the proportionality thesis. Socrates doesn't have time or complete knowledge to explain these claims fully (108d). Nonetheless, it is reasonable for Cebes and Simmias to accept his claims (or something close to them) given that (a) they accept the immortality of the soul, (b) the beliefs will have prudential value, and (c) they have been following Socrates' advice and guarded themselves against misology.

We take (b) to be fairly obvious, and we have already explained (c). That leaves us with (a), which requires some unpacking. In the relevant passage, Socrates says that the risk is worth taking because "this, or

something like it, is true about our souls and their dwelling place, since the soul appears to be immortal [ἐπείπερ ἀθάνατόν γε ἡ ψυχὴ φαίνεται οὖσα]" (114d2–4). Socrates' use of the causal conjunction *epeiper* demonstrates that one of the reasons why everyone should risk belief in the proportionality thesis is that he takes it to be quite plausible that the soul is immortal and that there is an afterlife. This highlights a way in which the epistemic risk for believing the myth at this point has been reduced. If we have good reasons for believing that the soul is immortal, then we have good reasons for believing that there is some sort of afterlife. But why believe that the afterlife is like this?

In answering this question, the first point to note is that beliefs about the details of the afterlife are rather innocuous given the nature of the subject matter. We can never be extremely confident about the particular claims we make about the nature of the afterlife. We can't, for instance, know whether the sky is blue in Heaven or whether there are rivers and angels; we can only speculate about these issues through myth (see Gallop 1975, 224). So there is a risk, but the risk primarily stems from the nature of the subject matter and not from some defect in reasoning.

Second, Socrates seems to assume a conditional version of the proportionality thesis. Emily Austin (2010, 47) puts this point well when she says that Socrates "assumes the afterlife will be good because to think otherwise would be at odds with his conception of piety. If there are gods, they are good by definition, and that is his guiding constraint." It seems likely that Socrates' friends share the acceptance of this conditional claim. This is why they question his views about the soul but never question the proportionality thesis nor his view of the gods, despite there being plenty of opportunities to raise objections about these issues.[20]

Finally, in the earlier passage, Socrates was issuing prescriptions that would encourage his friends to engage in a philosophical discussion, but at 114d he is telling them what they need to hear now that he is leaving. At the end of the *Phaedo*, Socrates expresses compassion for those around him in a number of ways. He baths before his death to "save the women the trouble of washing the corpse" (115a8–9). He also shows gentleness towards the weeping officer of the Eleven who tells him to drink the hemlock (116b–d). Socrates knows his friends are on the verge of tears, not merely for his sake, but because they will be without their close friend and leader (116a and 117d). Accordingly, the myth and encouragement at the end of the dialogue are meant to inspire boldness in his friends—not to dogmatically accept Socrates' arguments, but to believe in the values and ideals that will inspire them to continue to practice philosophy without their leader (115a–118a). This is why, when Crito asks Socrates how his friends might please him most (115b), Socrates says:

> Nothing new, but what I am always saying, that you will please me and mine and yourselves by taking good care of your own selves

> in whatever you do, even if you don't agree with me now, but if you neglect your own selves, and are unwilling to live following the tracks, as it were, of what we have said now and on previous occasions, you will achieve nothing, even if you strongly agree with me at this moment.
>
> (115b5–c1)

Therefore, there is no contradiction: the situation, beliefs, and characters involved are different in the two scenarios.

4.4 The Limits of Truth

Before closing, there is an important concern that merits our attention. In light of the preceding discussion, one might worry that Socrates' pragmatic approach in the *Phaedo* reveals weakness or perhaps even hypocrisy. After boldly claiming that death is nothing to him in the *Gorgias*, *Crito*, and *Apology*, as his demise draws near in the *Phaedo*, Socrates tries to convince himself of things for which he has little evidence in order to maintain a tranquil state of mind and embrace his death in a fearless manner. However, the fact that Socrates took these measures to prevent becoming affected doesn't reveal weakness but rather admirable prudence.

Socrates was aware that he was not a divine being but rather an embodied man, and his embodied nature made him susceptible to irrational responses. This is, after all, one of the central themes of the *Phaedo*. Philosophers try to remove the soul from the body as far as possible (65a), but the body is a prison (62b) and some bodily influence is inevitable—this is why we cannot obtain true knowledge until we die (65e–67b). Socrates, being aware of this, takes precaution by dabbling in a little motivated reasoning to counteract the negative influences of the body. This willingness to risk believing falsely for the sake of preserving internal harmony was explicitly endorsed by Epictetus, who idolized Socrates as a paragon of virtue:

> If I had to be deceived into believing that externals, which lie outside of our power, are not man's proper concern, personally I would consent to such a deception, provided it really could enable me to live an untroubled life, in peace of mind. Which condition you prefer you can determine for yourself.
>
> (*Disc.* 1.4.27)

Elsewhere, Epictetus is quoted as saying: "When the health of our soul and self-respect is at stake, even irrational measures are justified" (*Frag.* 10a).

One reason why even someone as philosophical as Socrates needed to take extra precautions in order to prevent grief and fear is that he had

loving relationships with other people. On the assumption that there is no afterlife, death represents the end of loving relationships, and this can make one susceptible to sorrow and fear. Although these affective responses are not good in themselves, they are a common by-product of the relationships that must be formed in order for social beings to flourish and for societies to maintain harmony. As we explained in Chapters 1 and 3, and will continue to explain in Chapters 7 and 8, the collective grieving of Kallipolis binds it together (*Resp.* 5.462a–e).[21] Now, it is true that Plato does censor poetry that depicts heroes grieving or fearing death (3.387d–388a). But this is an attempt to mitigate grief and fear as much as possible—the fact remains that even strong individuals are at risk of experiencing these responses. Since communal love is necessary for harmony, and since this love makes it even harder to become immune to grief and fear, the best remedy is to try to mitigate the problematic affective responses as much as possible. In some instances, this might even require that we set aside our general commitment to avoiding false beliefs.[22]

4.5 Summary

In this chapter, we have provided compelling evidence against the Epistemic Caution Claim through our investigation of the *Phaedo*. We have seen that while a philosophical approach directed at truth is generally advisable, there are circumstances in which one ought to try to cause oneself to form certain beliefs despite a lack of sufficient evidence. We argued that three key factors permit Socrates to be a self-directed eristic with regards to the afterlife: his proximity to death, his epistemic authority, and the unique importance of his facing death without fear. One upshot of this is a lesson about the vulnerability and dependency of the human condition. The fact that we are physically fragile and vulnerable to affective responses means that, in order to attain virtue, we must take non-ideal measures such as cultivating certain beliefs in the absence of sufficient evidence. In the next chapter, we continue developing our case against the Epistemic Caution Claim by examining *aporia* (puzzlement) and faith in the *Meno*.

Notes

1 The proportionality thesis is scattered throughout the Platonic corpus (see especially *Grg.* 523a–527e; *Phdr.* 246d–249e; *Resp.* 10.614b–621d; *Ti.* 90a–92c; and *Legs.* 9.870d–e, 9.872d–873a, 9.881a–b, and 10.903d).

2 "Misology" is not a common word for Plato. For examples of other uses, see *La.* 188c and *Resp.* 3.411d. Gallop (1975, 154) and Woolf (2007, 3) point out that the problem with using the word "argument" to translate *logos* is that at 90b6–8 and 90c9 Socrates says that *logos* can be true and false. This makes for an awkward translation to the extent that arguments are not standardly understood as being true or false. However, this worry might be

anachronistic; as we discussed in Chapter 1, Socrates is liberal with his application of "true" and "false."

3 Rowe (1993, 215) suggests that Socrates' assertion that he is in danger of being unphilosophical is a reflection of his earlier performance (cf. 84b), which "contains more persuasive description than hard reasoning." Rowe takes the "I shall" to signify a "reversal" in which Simmias and Cebes take on the role of philosophers. We are sympathetic to both interpretive claims. The latter claim is supported by Socrates' encouragement at 91c, 107b, and 115b–c.

4 Examples of this are Callicles from the *Gorgias* and Euthydemus and Dionysodorus from the *Euthydemus*.

5 Dorter (1982, 93–94) and Woolf (2007) share this interpretation. For an objection to Woolf (2007), see Wood (2007).

6 Notice how Socrates' attitude towards death here differs from his attitude in the *Apology* and the *Gorgias*. In the *Apology*, he maintains that even if death doesn't lead to a good afterlife, it is not something bad because then it would merely be like a long dreamless sleep (40c–41c; see Austin 2010). Similarly, in the *Gorgias*, Socrates says, "For no one who isn't totally bereft of reason and courage is afraid to die" (522e; see Baima forthcoming). In contrast, here, Socrates suggests that if there isn't a good afterlife, then there is reason to resent death; cf. Austin (2019).

7 As noted by G. Brown (1984, 469), Socrates' reasoning is strikingly similar to that of Pascal in his famous wager argument for theistic belief. We should be clear, however, that this visual representation merely gestures at the kinds of considerations Socrates is weighing and should not be treated as a decision theory model.

8 Rowe (1993, 215–216) opts for the ironic reading: "although with his usual 'irony' he pretends to be [like the eristic]. Rather, he is as complete a philosopher (see esp. 76b–c), and therefore as skilled in argument, as anyone living. Something which appears true to him will therefore have passed the most exacting test available." However, the problem with eristics is not that they are unskilled with arguments—that is the cause of misology. Rather, the problem is that they don't care about the truth of the position they are defending. The fact that they are usually good at arguing can make them all the more dangerous. Gallop (1975, 155) maintains that Socrates is sincere when he says he is only concerned with trying to convince himself and not others and argues that this is the mark of a true philosopher (see *Chrm*. 166d). However, if we take Socrates at his word here, this is hardly the conclusion we should draw because he is suggesting that he will act like the eristic.

9 Dorter (1982, 93) writes, "Accordingly, throughout the *Phaedo* Socrates assumes the role of a partisan advocate rather than his more accustomed role of a disinterested inquirer."

10 On the conflict between poetry and philosophy, see *Resp*. 10.607b; Levin (2001). Commenting on this passage, Nietzsche, in the *Birth of Tragedy* (14) writes, "Finally, in prison, in order completely to unburden his conscience, he even agreed to make the music for which he had so little respect. And in this frame of mind, he composed a proemium to Apollo and rewrote some Aesopian fables in verse … Perhaps there is a domain of wisdom which excludes the logician? Perhaps art is even a necessary correlative of and supplement to science?" And in the next section (15), Nietzsche continues, "By the torchlight of this thought, let us now take a look at Socrates: he appears to us now as the first man who was able not only to live according to that instinct of science, but what is more significant by far—also to die according to it: and so the image of the *dying Socrates*, the man elevated above the

fear of death through knowledge and reasoning, is the heraldic shield hung above the entrance gate to science in order to remind everyone of its purpose, namely to make existence appear intelligible and so justified: and, if reasons prove insufficient, even myth must finally serve this end, *myth* which I have just characterized even as the necessary consequence, indeed as the intended goal of science." See also Epictetus *Disc*. 2.6.26–27 and 4.4.22.

11 Wood (2007, 21–22), in his response to Woolf (2007), argues that Plato is not advocating a full belief in these claims. Rather, Socrates is merely recommending that one posit these claims as if they were true, as a kind of "regulative ideal." However, when Socrates describes the myth of the afterlife at 108–114c, he explicitly says that he is convinced or persuaded of the things he is about to say.

12 This is how Dorter (1982, 94) reads this passage: "Socrates has here abandoned his usual philosophical role of a non-partisan examiner of things in favor of that of an advocate determined to make what he believes to be true seem as true as possible. He believes that there is a meaningful sense in which we can be called immortal and he is determined not only to give proofs of this (which could be compatible also with a non-partisan role) but also to make it seem as likely as possible by unphilosophical means as well, and thus his love of victory here is *contrasted* with the disinterested love of wisdom, philosophy." Cobb (1977, 176) offers a similar reading: "Socrates explicitly drops the role of the philosopher who seeks the truth for that of the advocate, the champion who seeks to defeat the enemy."

13 The Neo-Platonists, for instance, argued that suicide was dangerous because it could ruin one's soul (see Gertz 2011, Chap. 1).

14 Some scholars argue that Socrates' disavowal of knowledge is ironic (see Kahn 1996, 201 and Gulley 1968, 69). Others argue that it isn't ironic; rather, he is conveying that he lacks complete understanding (see Vlastos 1999a; Brickhouse and Smith 1994, Chap. 2; Fine 2008; and Matthews 2006).

15 "Such was the end of our friend, Echecrates, a man who, we would say was of all those we have known the best, and also the wisest and the most upright" (118a).

16 We thank Emily Austin for this point—and for her general help with this chapter.

17 In his unpublished article, "'Virtue Ethics' and the Problem of Advising Fools," Eric Brown illustrates a similar idea with an example from Seneca: "Panaetius seems to me to have responded elegantly to some young man who asked him whether the sage would become a lover: 'Concerning the sage, we shall see; but you and I, who are currently far from the sage, should not commit ourselves to fall into a condition that is disordered, uncontrolled, enslaved to another, contemptible to life itself. For if [our beloved] shows regard for us, we would be excited by the kindness; [but] if [our beloved] scorns us, we would be kindled by our pride. Ease in love hurts us as much as difficulty; we are captured by the ease, and we struggle with the difficulty. Therefore, knowing our weakness, let us remain quiet …' What Panaetius said about love in response to the questioner I say about all passions" (*Ep*. 116.5–6). In other words, it might be appropriate for the sage to engage in the passions because she can moderate them, but it is inappropriate for non-sages, given that they cannot moderate them.

18 Consider one of Epictetus' final and most forceful instructions in the *Handbook*: "Finally decide that you are an adult who is going to devote the rest of your life to making progress. Abide by what seems best as if it were an inviolable law. When faced with anything painful or pleasurable, anything bringing glory or disrepute, realize that the crisis is now, that the Olympics

have started, and waiting is no longer an option; that the chance for progress, to keep or to lose, turns on the events of a single day. That's how Socrates got to be the person he was, by depending on reason to meet his every challenge. You're not yet Socrates, but you can still live as if you want to be him" (51.2–3). A notable example of Socrates' influence from recent history is that of Martin Luther King Jr., whose famous "Letter from Birmingham Jail" includes multiple references to Socrates' philosophical life and noble death.

19 James' preface to *The Will to Believe* is helpful on this point: "The first four essays are largely concerned with defending the legitimacy of religious faith. To some rationalizing readers such advocacy will seem a sad misuse of one's professional position. Mankind, they will say, is only prone to follow faith unreasoningly, and needs no preaching nor encouragement in that direction. I quite agree that what mankind at large most lacks is criticism and caution, not faith. Its cardinal weakness is to let belief follow recklessly upon lively conception, especially when the conception has instinctive liking at its back. I admit, then, that were I addressing the Salvation Army or a miscellaneous popular crowd it would be a misuse of opportunity … What such audiences most need is that their faiths should be broken up … But academic audiences, fed already on science, have a very different need. Paralysis of their native capacity for faith and timorous *abulia* in the religious field are their special forms of mental weakness" (x).

20 The *Apology* presents a defense of Socrates' life to the public generally, while the *Phaedo* presents it to his friends (see 63e–64a).

21 There are two main interpretations of Socrates' discussion of the appropriateness of grief in the *Republic*. The "no-conflict reading" maintains that grief is a negative emotion to be avoided at all times (see LaBarge 2012, esp. 324n7; Lorenz 2006, 62–63; Nussbaum 1984, 70–71; Harte 2010, 84; Murray 2011; Levin 2001, 165; and Pappas 1995, 179). The "conflict reading" maintains that grief is ineliminable and sometimes valuable (see Austin 2016; Bloom 1991, 433; Hursthouse, 1984, 87; and G. Ferrari 1989, 133).

22 The idea that overcoming the moral obstacles of human frailty provides practical justification for assenting to certain unknowable propositions about the afterlife is present in Kant. In the *Critique of Judgement*, Kant argues that human beings are susceptible to losing their moral resolve when faced with the futility of their moral efforts in a world of "purposeless chaos." In order to combat this, we must assume the existence of a just God, who will ensure that virtue will ultimately be the cause of corresponding happiness, and that the result of our moral efforts will be the *highest good*—a world of complete virtue combined with complete happiness (5:451–452; see Pasternack 2014, 51–54; and Paytas 2020). Socrates' instruction that a man should repeat the positive view of the afterlife "as if it were an incantation" (114d) has some similarities to Kant's claim that we must represent the highest good as the ultimate end (i.e. outcome) of our moral conduct (REL 6:7).

5 Better, Braver, and Less Idle
Faith and Inquiry in the *Meno*

> We stand on a mountain pass in the midst of whirling snow and blinding mist, through which we get glimpses now and then of paths which may be deceptive. If we stand still, we shall be frozen to death. If we take the wrong road we shall be dashed to pieces. We do not certainly know whether there is any right one. What must we do? "Be strong and of a good courage." Act for the best, hope for the best, and take what comes … If death ends all, we cannot meet it better.
>
> (James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* 353–354)

> I think that yesterday was a crisis in my life. I finished the first part of Renouvier's second "Essais" and see no reason why his definition of Free Will—"the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts"—need be the definition of an illusion. At any rate, I will assume for the present—until next year—that it is no illusion. My first act of free will shall be to believe in free will.
>
> (William James, L 147)

The Epistemic Caution Claim attributes to Plato the view that we ought never to form beliefs in the absence of strong evidence. The previous chapter challenged this claim through a vivid example in which Plato appears to advocate deliberately cultivating a belief for which there is little evidence. Given the magnitude of the stakes he faced, Socrates was justified in being partial to the claim that his soul is immortal and destined for a better place, despite the lack of sufficient objective grounds for this belief. While we take this to be compelling evidence for the falsity of the Epistemic Caution Claim, our pragmatist interpretation would be strengthened by showing that Plato's endorsement of epistemic risk extends across a broader range of contexts. This chapter aims to do exactly that: we will argue that, for Plato, the activity of inquiry itself requires a leap of faith, and that the associated epistemic risk is justified as an act of bravery that is necessary for living an excellent human life.

Our argument in this chapter centers on the *Meno*. This dialogue is perhaps most famous for expressing a paradox of inquiry—that one

cannot inquire into something that one doesn't already know, and yet neither can one inquire into something that one does know.[1] While the paradox is articulated in the course of an investigation of a particular topic (the nature of virtue), it presents a more general challenge to the idea of rational inquiry. The challenge concerns the possibility of being rationally motivated to pursue knowledge, as stated in the following dilemma: either (a) we think that we have knowledge, in which case we have no reason to search for it; or (b) we think that knowledge is beyond us, in which case we see no point to inquiring.

We will argue that Socrates' solution to this problem involves an appeal to faith and its relation to virtue. Although we lack objective grounds for confidence in the possibility of knowledge, we exhibit excellence in the form of intellectual courage by proceeding on the assumption that knowledge is possible. This in turn allows us to engage in the virtuous activity of inquiry. If this is right, then we will have discovered further reason to doubt the Epistemic Caution Claim: not only can we be justified in risking falsehood in extreme circumstances, such as when Socrates was facing his death, but also the entire enterprise of rational inquiry is rendered possible only through the willingness to take a leap in the dark.

5.1 Obstacles to Inquiry

The dialogue begins with Meno asking Socrates how virtue is acquired—whether through education, practice, nature, or by some other means. Socrates responds by noting that he is ill-equipped to answer this question because he doesn't even know what virtue is (71b).[2] So, the interlocutors transition to the more basic question about the nature of virtue itself. After several failed attempts to define virtue, Meno complains that on several other occasions he has given many fine speeches on this topic, but now he is at a loss—it is as if Socrates is a torpedo fish making Meno's mind and tongue numb (80a–b). Socrates replies that he is more perplexed than anyone; so, he is only like a torpedo fish if the fish itself is numb when it stuns others (80c). Following this, he says, "So now I do not know what virtue is; perhaps you knew before you contacted me, but now you are certainly like one who doesn't know. Nevertheless, I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be" (80d1–4).

Meno responds by reciting a puzzle he has heard:

> [M1] In what way, Socrates, will you search [*zētēseis*] for it when you don't know at all [*parapan*] what it is? [M2] What sort of thing, among those that you don't know, will you set up as the object of your search? [M3] If you should meet with it, how will you know that this is the thing that you didn't know?
>
> (80d5–8)

Meno's first two questions concern the beginning of inquiry: if our minds are a completely blank slate, then any real methodological inquiry cannot get off the ground (see Benson 2015, 55). For instance, in the second question, Meno asks us to single out one thing among the set of things that we have no idea about and to start looking for it. There is no systemic or rational way to search for that which we have no awareness of whatsoever. But if we are determined to act, one thing we can do is to just start inquiring about various things: asking questions and proposing answers to them. Now, if we adopt this strategy, it is possible that we will hit upon the correct answer by chance; however, we have no way of recognizing that it is the correct answer because we have no standard by which to judge—this is the thrust of the third question. Hence, on Meno's formulation of the puzzle, we cannot inquire into that which we do not know because we will know neither where to begin nor where to end (Benson 2015, 55).

Socrates responds by slightly rephrasing the problem:

> I know what you want to say, Meno. Do you see what a contentious [*eristikon*] argument you are bringing up, [S1] that a person can't search [*zētein*] either for what he knows or for what he doesn't know? [S2] He can't search for what he knows—[S3] since he knows it, there is no need to search [οἶδεν γάρ, καὶ οὐδὲν δεῖ τῷ γε τοιούτῳ ζητήσεως]—[S4] nor for what he doesn't know, [S5] for he doesn't know what to look for.
>
> (80e1–5)

Socrates' formulation of the puzzle presents us with a clear dilemma which, if sound, establishes that rational inquiry is impossible:

1. (Dilemma) Either *A* knows what *X* is or *A* does not know what *X* is. (Supplied)
2. ("The No Need Problem," NNP) If *A* knows what *X* is, then *A* does not need to search for what *X* is. (S3)
3. If *A* does not need to search for what *X* is, then *A* cannot search for what *X* is. (Implied)
4. (NNP conclusion) So, if *A* knows what *X* is, then *A* cannot search for what *X* is. (S2)
5. ("The No Hope Problem," NHP) If *A* does not know what *X* is, then *A* does not know what to search for. (S5)
6. If *A* does not know what to search for, then *A* cannot search for what *X* is. (Implied)
7. (NHP conclusion) So, if *A* does not know what *X* is, then *A* cannot search for what *X* is. (S4)
8. (Dilemma conclusion) Therefore, *A* cannot search for what *X* is; in other words, inquiry is impossible. (S1)[3]

In what follows, we'll look at the difficulties that the argument poses by examining NNP and NHP. NNP illuminates two key ideas. First, there is the conceptual point that searching for some object requires that one doesn't already possess it (at least not in the fullest sense). That is, a lack is built into the concept of inquiry. Second, there is the psychological point that what drives us to search for something is the recognition that we are missing it.

The psychological dimension of NNP isn't isolated to the *Meno* but is expressed throughout Plato's corpus, and perhaps most poignantly in the *Symposium*. Socrates challenges Agathon's account of love as containing various good qualities by arguing that one loves and desires something that one doesn't have: "the desiring subject desires something of which it is in need; otherwise, if it weren't in need, it wouldn't desire it. I can't tell you, Agathon, how strongly it strikes me that this is necessary" (200a9–b2). This point is then drawn out further:

> [Love] is in between wisdom and ignorance as well. In fact, you see, none of the gods loves wisdom or wants to become wise—for they are wise—and no one else who is wise already loves wisdom; on the other hand, no one who is ignorant will love wisdom either or want to become wise. For what's especially difficult about being ignorant is that you are content with yourself, even though you're neither beautiful and good nor intelligent. If you don't think you need anything, of course you won't want what you don't think you need.
>
> (203e5–204a7)

Being ignorant of one's ignorance is a wretched state: such individuals are ignorant in two different respects (i.e. ignorant of the thing that they think that they know and ignorant of their ignorance), and their lack of awareness prevents them from being motivated to improve their condition (see *Ap*. 29d). A much better state to be in is one of *aporia*, or puzzlement, which can give us the motivation to inquire further. It is often the case that we are able to awaken into a state of puzzlement through the help of others. In the *Meno*, Socrates attempts to drive this point home while demonstrating that all knowledge is a matter of recollection. He seeks to prove this hypothesis by interrogating one of Meno's slaves on a topic that the slave would presumably not have been educated about. He questions the slave about a geometry problem—how to find a square double in area, given the length of the side. Through the process of question and answer, the slave comes to recognize that his initial response to the geometry question was mistaken, and such recognition allows him eventually to arrive at the correct answer.

> Do you realize, Meno, what progress he has already made in his recollection? At first he didn't know what the basic line of the eight-foot

> square was, and even now he doesn't yet know: but then he thought that he knew, and answered confidently as if he did know, and he didn't think himself at a loss; but now he does think himself at a loss, and as he doesn't know, neither does he think that he knows.
>
> (84a3–b1)

Socrates explains that being "numbed" as by a torpedo fish in this manner isn't harmful, but is actually beneficial:

> Indeed, we have probably achieved something relevant to finding out how matters stand, for now, as he doesn't know, he would be glad to find out, whereas before he thought he could easily make many fine speeches to large audiences about the square of double size and said that it must have a base twice as long … Do you think that before he would have tried to find out that which he thought he knew though he did not, before he fell into perplexity and realized he didn't know and longed to know?
>
> (84b9–c6)

Although Socrates purports to be speaking about the slave, he is also talking about Meno. The slave never had grand ambitions of making fine speeches about geometry, whereas Meno has already bragged about making excellent speeches about virtue before large audiences on countless occasions (80b).

We, thus, see that the failure to observe one's ignorance can stymie inquiry and that *aporia* is a tool that can help us to overcome this psychological hurdle. However, *aporia* alone cannot resolve the paradox, for NHP raises three issues of its own. First, there is the conceptual point that one must be able to recognize the thing that one is searching for in order to complete an inquiry. Second, underlying this first point is the idea that there must be something out there to be recognized. Third, there is the psychological point that, unless one thinks that there is a truth to the matter and that one is capable of discovering it, one cannot bring oneself to inquire at all.

Thus, although *aporia* can help spur us past the psychological hurdles of NNP, it doesn't resolve the psychological obstacles of NHP. As we see throughout Plato's dialogues—as well as everyday life—recognizing one's own ignorance, as well as one's general weakness and vulnerability, often leads not to action but to frustration and despondency. Indeed, this response seems hard to avoid in light of Meno's paradox. For by recognizing that we are ignorant, it becomes difficult to see how we can proceed rationally in search of the knowledge we lack. Not only is it unclear how we might effectively direct such a search, but it is also unclear how we could even recognize when the target of our search has been found. Consider, for example, the inquiries that tend to occupy

philosophers—God's existence, free will, the nature of normativity, the "hard problem" of consciousness, etc. It is possible that, unbeknownst to us, we have already encountered some solutions to these philosophical problems. With these worries in mind, it is easy to see how one might be tempted to give up on the project of seeking knowledge altogether.

This problem relates to Socrates' warnings about the dangers of misology that we encountered in the previous chapter (see Scott 2006, 124–125). Recall that misology arises when one who is unskilled with arguments puts his trust in the truth of an argument only to be quickly convinced that it is false.[4] As a result, the individual starts to believe that no position is sound and that attempting to arrive at the truth via argument is futile. Socrates warns his friends that "there is no greater evil one can suffer than to hate reasonable discourse" (89d2–3). He adds that adopting such a stance would be especially pitiable if there is a "true and reliable argument and one that can be understood" (90c8–d1).

This unskilled arguer bears resemblance to Meno. Notice that Meno only brings up the paradox of inquiry after he is unable to give a satisfactory account of virtue. In response to the intellectual difficulty Socrates presents, Meno folds his hand by presenting the paradox; for if inquiry is impossible, then it isn't Meno's fault that he is unable to discover the nature of virtue. This is why, in the *Phaedo*, Socrates advises that, rather than thinking that there is no soundness in arguments at all, his friends should think *themselves* unsound and must "take courage and be eager to attain soundness" (90e3).

Thus, we must carefully navigate between the Scylla of thinking that we have knowledge and the Charybdis of thinking that knowledge is unattainable. We see that Meno has succumbed to both monsters. Meno thought he had knowledge of virtue and was surprised that Socrates wanted to investigate this topic (71b–c, e). When confronted with his ignorance, Meno responds by presenting a paradox that makes searching for the truth impossible. If we are fortunate enough to avoid Scylla by recognizing our ignorance, how can we evade Charybdis? This appears especially difficult since the recognition of human fallibility and weakness—the very recognition that generates *aporia*—is the source of hopelessness associated with skepticism. In the next section, we examine how Socrates guides Meno towards smoother waters.

5.2 Virtue as a Reason for Belief

The following is the core of Socrates' response to Meno's challenge:

> As the soul is immortal, has been born often and has seen all things here and in the underworld, there is nothing which it hasn't learned; so it is in no way surprising that it can recollect the things it knew before, both about virtue and other things. As the whole of nature is

> akin, and the soul has learned everything, nothing prevents a man, after recalling one thing only—a process men call learning—discovering everything else for himself, *if he is brave and doesn't tire of the search*, for searching and learning are, as a whole, recollection. We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument, for that would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search. *Putting my trust in its truth*, I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue. (81c5–e2, emphasis added)

Here Socrates puts forth a hypothesis that purports to explain how knowledge acquisition is possible after all. The suggestion is that human souls are immortal, and that prior to birth in our terrestrial bodies, we already possessed knowledge of virtue as well as everything else.[5] Hence, learning isn't a matter of obtaining completely new knowledge (which seems impossible in light of Meno's paradox) but rather recalling information that one already possesses.

Unsurprisingly, Socrates' explanation perplexes Meno, and so Meno invites Socrates to prove that things are as he described. While acknowledging that this will not be an easy task, Socrates says that he will do his best for Meno's sake. It is at this point that Socrates asks Meno to call forth one of his slaves and proceeds to give the famous demonstration of the theory of recollection. Throughout this process, Socrates insists that he isn't teaching the slave but that the slave is recollecting. Guided by Socrates' questioning, and after trial and error—making many wrong turns and recognizing and accepting that they are wrong—the slave hits upon the correct answer, despite never having previously been taught geometry.

Socrates goes on to argue that the best explanation for the slave's ability to answer the geometry question correctly is that his soul had acquired this knowledge at some point prior to birth. Socrates extrapolates that this is true not just of the slave and this particular question but is true of all human beings concerning "all other knowledge" (85e2–3). And if this is right, then we can always engage confidently in inquiry because this is really just a process of recalling what we already know (86b).

As has often been pointed out, numerous aspects of Socrates' argument are vulnerable to serious objections. To begin, the theory of recollection is presented as a myth—something Socrates heard from priests and priestesses (81a–d).[6] Although Plato wants us to take the lesson of the myth seriously, by presenting it as a story and not a reasoned account, he is indicating that it is epistemically wanting (cf. *Grg.* 523a; see Baima forthcoming). That is, Plato accepts that recollection occurs and that inquiry is possible, but he doesn't know how to demonstrate this via argument. Setting aside the questionable background of the theory of recollection, it isn't clear how the mythical account of recollection resolves the paradox.

Being told that our souls are immortal doesn't explain how knowledge got into our souls in the first place.[7] One might take the claim that "all nature is akin" (81c9–d1) to explain this, but it is difficult not to sympathize with undergraduate students who roll their eyes at this response. We demand of our students—and Socrates demands of his interlocutors—that arguments be clear, precise, and fully explained, and this "account" doesn't meet those standards.[8]

There are also reasons to doubt the slave example. First, as students often remind us, many of Socrates' questions are not genuine questions but rather statements explicating the relevant information. Consider, for example, his "question" to the slave: "Within these four figures, each line cuts off half of each, does it not?" (85a5–6).[9] Second, even if the slave had correctly answered all of the questions entirely of his own accord, this would not demonstrate that *all* things are known prenatally and that we need only to recollect. For it is possible that we have prenatal knowledge of certain topics such as geometry, but not other topics such as the nature of virtue (Weiss 2001, 79–83). To further complicate things, Socrates knows the answer to the geometry question but doesn't know what virtue is (Weiss 2001, 83; cf. Fine 1992, 211–212 and 2014, 122–123)—and has yet to meet anyone who does. Hence, the slave's investigation is, on the face of it, different from the investigation into virtue.[10] Third, the connection between the myth, recollection, and the slave example isn't airtight (see Weiss 2001, 99). Even if we have extensive knowledge of all topics prenatally, this wouldn't entail that we have immortal souls that existed prior to the existence of our physical bodies; for it doesn't exclude that prenatal knowledge arises when our brain first begins to develop, and then we lose our knowledge during the trauma of childbirth. Nor does Socrates rule out that, rather than having prenatal knowledge, we have innate conceptual hardware or cognitive predispositions that become actualized through experience (Scott 2006, 108–109; Samet and Zaitchik 2017)—in which case, the myth misses the mark by not conveying the appropriate message.[11]

Meno responds that Socrates' account seems right to him, but he isn't sure how (86b). Socrates agrees with Meno in having reservations about some aspects of the argument ("I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects" (86b6–7)). But despite his lack of certainty, Socrates forcefully expresses his commitment to the conclusion of the argument:

> But I would contend at all costs both in word and deed as far as I could that we will be better, braver, and less idle, if we believe that one must search for the things one doesn't know, rather than if we believe that it isn't possible to find out what we do not know and that we must not look for it.
>
> (86b7–c2)

Here Socrates echoes a point that he had made earlier in the dialogue when he said, "We must, therefore, not believe that debater's argument, for it would make us idle, and fainthearted men like to hear it, whereas my argument makes them energetic and keen on the search" (81d5–e1; see also Rohatyn 1980, 70; L. Pangle 2014, 99).[12]

In these passages, Socrates is clearly making an appeal to ethical considerations in order to justify accepting a proposition for which, by his own account, there is insufficient evidence. A precondition for rational inquiry is holding that the truth is out there and that we can somehow grasp it in our minds. To undertake an activity in a rational manner entails accepting that success (at least in the form of genuine progress) in that activity is possible. That is not to say that the value of an activity solely resides in the end—the process itself can be valuable, depending on the activity—rather, our point is that it is absurd to pursue an end while holding that progress towards that end is impossible. Although Socrates recognizes that his demonstration with the slave is inadequate for vindicating this idea, he is deeply committed to carrying on as if it were because this is what a person must do if she is to be brave and active rather than fainthearted and idle.

This appeal to courage echoes Plato's treatment of the dangers of misology in the *Phaedo*. There Socrates urges that when we encounter contradictions or dialectical stalemates, we should not lose confidence in the method of rational discourse or the possibility of reaching a fully justified conclusion. He characterizes the correct approach as an act of bravery: "We should not allow into our minds the conviction that argumentation has nothing sound about it; much rather we should believe that it is we who are not yet sound and that we must take courage and be eager to attain soundness" (90d9–e3).

Note further the pejorative tone that Socrates takes regarding the skeptical position that rational inquiry and knowledge itself are beyond reach. He suggests that those who embrace skeptical conclusions are driven to idleness and that the fainthearted are fond of Meno's paradox. Skepticism not only contributes to intellectual laziness but also provides comfort for those who are already inclined towards slothfulness—if there isn't anything out there to discover, we can rest comfortably with our ignorance (*Resp*. 6.504c). Such a condition also encourages bullshiting, as Harry Frankfurt warns:

> The contemporary proliferation of bullshit also has deeper sources, in various forms of skepticism which deny that we can have any reliable access to an objective reality, and which therefore reject the possibility of knowing how things truly are. These "antirealist" doctrines undermine confidence in the value of disinterested efforts to determine what is true and what is false, and even in the intelligibility of the notion of objective inquiry.
>
> (2005, 64–65)

It is the importance of avoiding these vices and pursuing virtue that, as much as anything else, motivates the optimistic reply to the problem that Meno presents.[13]

We have argued that Socrates endorses believing that it is possible to engage in rational inquiry for practical reasons—that such a belief will embolden one to be better. We have defended this claim by showing how the myth of recollection and the slave demonstration fail to warrant believing that we have the capacity for succeeding in inquiry to a degree that would make it a rational endeavor. Now one might object by pointing out that there is other evidence that supports the possibility of rational inquiry. For instance, one might suggest that Socrates implicitly appeals to the distinctions between ignorance, true belief, and knowledge, and that the intermediate state, true belief, provides a means of resolving the paradox of inquiry.

To be sure, distinguishing between ignorance, true belief, and knowledge is relevant for resolving the paradox. As Gail Fine (1992, 210) rightly points out, though the slave lacks knowledge, Socrates says that the slave "has in himself true beliefs about the things he doesn't know" (85c6–7). If there is an intermediate state between knowledge and ignorance, then one can potentially escape the dilemma. If one has beliefs about *X*, one can overcome NNP since the gap between belief and knowledge provides a need for inquiry. In addition, one's beliefs about *X* can mitigate NHP since one can use one's beliefs to help identify *X* (Fine 1992, 207–208).

While we suspect that the distinction between knowledge and true belief is part of Socrates' solution to the puzzle, there are reasons to doubt that the distinction is meant to play an important role for Meno at this point in the dialogue.[14] First, Socrates doesn't explicitly explain, nor does Meno fully grasp, the distinction between knowledge and true belief until 97a.[15] So, even if the distinction is ultimately relevant for resolving the puzzle, it cannot function as a reason for Meno at this stage—yet Socrates encourages him to believe nonetheless.[16] Second, Socrates' appeal to mythology and his statement at 86b6–7 (that he doesn't insist that his argument is right in all respects) strongly indicate that he doesn't take his account to be fully satisfactory. Finally, positing a gap in the evidence for this claim fits better with Socrates' call to act bravely. If the possibility of rational inquiry is obvious, then it isn't clear why Socrates encourages Meno so vehemently, whereas if there is some reason to still doubt the possibility of successful investigation, then this makes more sense. Therefore, while we grant that there is some sound reasoning that can help generate a solution to the paradox, we maintain that Socrates primarily exhorts Meno to accept the solution for pragmatic reasons, thereby undermining the Epistemic Caution Claim.

5.3 Intellectual Courage

In the previous section, we argued that Socrates provides practical reasons for believing that successful inquiry is possible—this belief will make one more active and courageous. We suggested a few ways in which this belief makes us less intellectually lazy—and insofar as we are more active, we are better. But it is reasonable to wonder how exactly inquiry makes us braver. Further, one might worry that there is something irresponsible and foolhardy about taking intellectual risks in the manner Socrates describes. Hence, the goal of this section is to explain how the approach Socrates advocates manifests courage without drifting into recklessness.

5.3.1 Courage

Courage typically relates to one's physical safety and material well-being (see Arist. *Eth. Nic.* 3.6; Scott 2006, 123)—intellectual pursuits are generally not seen as falling under this umbrella (cf. King 2014). So what exactly is Socrates up to when he invokes courage? Is this merely a rhetorical device meant to appeal to a young man's masculine identity? No doubt there is something to this charge—Socrates clearly aims to motivate and inspire, and calls to bravery are liable to stir the spirit of young men even if the call isn't supported by sufficient reason. However, we must bear in mind that Plato has a wider conception of courage than most. For instance, he sometimes classifies resisting pleasure as courageous (*La.* 191d–e; *Resp.* 4.429d–430b, 442b–c; and *Leg.* 1.633c–d, 1.634a–635d; see also Baima 2018 and 2019). To generalize, for Plato, courage involves endurance in the face of temptations (or counterfactual temptations).[17] Given how tempting it can be to give up on philosophical investigation in light of the pain involved in *aporia* and the uncertainty of truth, it is unsurprising that Plato is amenable to the idea that inquiry is a courageous endeavor. But the more important question is whether the idea itself is plausible. Is Socrates right about inquiry making us braver? We believe he is.

In order to see how inquiry can manifest a type of courage, we have to understand the full force of the threat that the paradox of inquiry poses. It is easy to see the paradox as a mere sophistic puzzle—like a Sudoku or a Rubik's cube, one can treat it as an intellectual game.[18] But underlying the paradox is a deep threat to philosophy and the possibility of a meaningful life. If reaching the end of inquiry, or even making genuine progress, is impossible—if we can never discover or make substantial progress towards learning important truths about things like justice and good character—then inquiry is not a rational endeavor. And if inquiry is not a rational endeavor, then Socrates' philosophical mission is rendered null. Thus, the stakes associated with the paradox are incredibly high.

Additionally, the claim that philosophical activity is irrational—that it is fundamentally a pedantic and fruitless endeavor—is tempting. While

it is commonplace for skeptics and laypersons to dismiss philosophy as empty speculation that doesn't lead anywhere, even professional philosophers worry about the possibility of genuine progress (Brennan 2010; Dietrich 2011; Unger 2014; and Slezak 2018, cf. Stoljar 2017). Though the answers to these skeptical challenges are familiar, the fact that we keep asking ourselves these questions isn't reassuring. And while related questions arise in science (Feyerabend 1975; Kuhn 2012; and R. Harris 2017), they are seldom as pronounced. Unlike philosophers, scientists are able to point to the tangible fruits of their endeavors in the form of technology. Further, there is less pervasive disagreement among scientists—many of the questions investigated in previous centuries are now settled by a general consensus. In contrast, most of the problems that Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle investigated are still matters of great controversy.

This pervasive disagreement is troubling in two respects: disagreement with an epistemic peer constitutes a reason to be less confident in one's own beliefs, and ongoing disagreement (especially about conceptual and normative matters) calls into question the possibility of our grasping the relevant truths, and perhaps even whether such truths exist at all. And if either of these bleak possibilities holds, then the attempt to answer what are seemingly the most important questions would be a giant waste of time.[19] This leads us back to the two conceptual worries of NHP: (1) For any given philosophical inquiry, there might not be anything out there to discover; and (2) even if there is, we might not be capable of recognizing it.

These sorts of worries are not external to Plato's writings—the skeptical threat looms large within the dialogues. One certainly doesn't find much hope for the possibility of philosophical knowledge in reading the aporetic dialogues. Failing to discover what he is looking for so many times, it would not be unreasonable to suggest to Socrates that he is incapable of ever finding it, and that this is probably because what he is looking for doesn't exist. Perhaps, instead of looking for the essence of a philosophical concept, he should just accept the ordinary usage of the terms, much like Wittgenstein:

> Reading the Socratic dialogues one has the feeling: what a frightful waste of time! What's the point of these arguments that prove nothing and that clarify nothing?
>
> (CV 14e)

> I can characterize my standpoint no better than by saying that it is the antithetical standpoint to the one occupied by Socrates in the Platonic dialogues. For if I were asked what knowledge is, I would enumerate instances of knowledge and add the words "and similar things." There is no shared constituent to be discovered in them since none exists.
>
> (VW 33)[20]

Upon facing repeated failure, it is easy to abandon the project of seeking robust philosophical truth—to see it as a hopeless and fruitless endeavor. But to continue to believe in the activity's value and not give up is an act of courage.[21] The inquirer boldly faces the epistemic danger of believing something false or developing a fruitless theory, as well as the practical danger of wasting one's time on an onerous task that may be futile. It would be much easier to accept commonplace answers to these thorny questions or to settle for some form of nihilism.[22] It is quite natural for human beings to experience an aversion to such risks. The inquirer is able to overcome her aversion because she deems the potential rewards to be of even greater significance than the potential costs. She is ultimately moved by the possibility (however uncertain) of discovering important truths, and she sees intrinsic value in the avoidance of laziness, cowardice, and nihilism. Looking at the contrary situation: to believe that there is something important to discover or a project that is worth pursuing and to abandon it when one faces a hardship is an act of cowardice. As Aristotle asserts, "The coward, then, is a kind of person who lacks hope, because he is afraid of everything" (*Eth. Nic.* 3.7.1116a1–2).

So, we see that there can be a type of courage involved and developed in pursuing inquiry. But as Aristotle also points out, it isn't a virtue to underappreciate danger or to be excessively bold, but a vice (see *Eth. Nich.* 3.7.1115b24–33, 3.8.1117a9–27). Alternatively, to put it more directly in terms of the *Meno*, courageous psychological features (*andreia*) without wisdom (*phronēsis*) result in recklessness, not courage (88a–b).[23] Might Socrates' call to inquiry be an invitation to foolhardiness? We can sharpen this worry by asking two questions. First, how can Socrates consistently criticize others for holding unjustified beliefs while accepting the non-futility of inquiry as an article of faith? Second, why doesn't Socrates simply endorse engaging in the activity of inquiry while withholding judgment about its status?

5.3.2 Courage vs. Recklessness

In order to explore when belief with insufficient evidence is acceptable and when it is not, it will be helpful to contrast Socrates' exhortation with Anytus' judgment that sophists are bad. In the hunt to discover educators of virtue, Socrates remarks that many consider sophists to be teachers of virtue (91b–c). Anytus responds, "By Heracles, hush, Socrates. May no one of my household or friends, whether citizen or stranger, be mad enough to go to these people and be harmed by them, for they clearly cause the ruin and corruption of their followers" (91c1–5). A harsh condemnation, but what is it based on? "Has some sophist wronged you, Anytus, or why are you so hard on them?" (92b5–6). Amazingly, Anytus replies that he has never met a sophist nor would he allow his people to do so; he is altogether without experience of them (92b–c). Socrates asks

how he knows that what sophists teach is completely bad if he lacks any experience of them (92c). Anytus replies: "Easily, for I know who they are, whether I have experience of them or not" (92c4–5). Socrates responds that maybe Anytus is a seer; for without some sort of magical power, how could one be certain of things without experiencing them (92c)?

Taking stock, Anytus believes that he knows that sophists are bad and corruptive, even though neither he nor anyone close to him has received lessons from a sophist. As it turns out, Anytus' belief is partially correct: sophists can be corruptive, and it might even be true that society would be overall better without them.[24] Yet, despite this, Anytus' attitude is dangerous and will eventually contribute to the trial and death of Socrates. Why is Socrates' belief with insufficient evidence appropriate but Anytus' isn't?

Before answering this question, it will be instructive to consider a few unsuccessful answers. The fact that Socrates recommends that a novice (Meno) accept that rational inquiry is possible without sufficient evidence means that we cannot invoke skill-based risk assessment to explain why the endorsement of one belief is permissible but the other is not. Another response simply appeals to the consequences: one belief results in good consequences, while the other results in bad consequences, and this explains why one is acceptable and the other is not. Although the consequences certainly matter, a bare appeal to effects of the beliefs isn't a compelling answer. As we explained in Chapter 3, while consequences are relevant for Plato's ethics, the locus of ethical concern is character. Additionally, it could simply be a contingent and unreliable fact that one belief results in more damage than the other. A better answer will explain why the content of one type of belief is inherently more dangerous than the content of the other, and why Anytus' general attitude is more dangerous than Socrates'.

The key difference between Socrates and Anytus is that Socrates possesses Socratic wisdom, and this is revealed in his endorsement of this practical belief. As we explained earlier, recognizing one's ignorance is critical for overcoming NNP. Additionally, when Socrates encourages Meno to accept this practical belief in order to overcome NHP, he does so while acknowledging—and not sweeping aside—the limits of the evidence he has provided ("I do not insist that my argument is right in all other respects," 86b6–7). In contrast, it doesn't even register with Anytus that not having experience—either directly or through a close friend—with sophists would limit his understanding of them ("Easily, for I know who they are, whether I have experience of them or not," 92c4–5). Put in terms of modern virtue epistemology, the critical difference between Socrates and Anytus is intellectual humility (see Whitcomb et al. 2017). Sometimes it is permissible to believe *beyond* the evidence, but when one does this, one must recognize that one has fallen short of knowledge.[25]

Turning to the content of the belief, we also see a significant difference. Socrates' belief is generative, while Anytus' belief is degenerative. The belief in the possibility of inquiry, or more generally, in the value of philosophy, inspires intellectual and creative activities, whereas the belief that sophists are bad curtails intellectual activity. Though there can be truth in stereotypes and rumors, merely accepting them full stop and not allowing people to investigate them is quite dangerous. It prevents us from discovering the differences between two related ideas (between, say, a philosopher and a sophist, or in contemporary popular political discussions, a socialist and a communist), as well as inhibiting us from seeing the positive aspects of ideas we disagree with.

This critical difference in terms of the content of belief also expresses a difference in attitude. Anytus' dismissal of sophists and sophistry expresses and encourages closed-mindedness. Even if the claim might be true, or have truth in it, dogmatically asserting that something is good or bad without considering the evidence in a responsible way manifests bad character (see Arpaly 2011, 80–81 and Battaly 2018b; cf. Battaly 2018a and Fantl 2018). Anytus' closed-mindedness is rooted in excessive fear: he is afraid that alternative educational structures pose a challenge to democratic values represented by Athenian noblemen. When Socrates challenges Anytus to establish that the noblemen have virtue and he fails, Anytus threatens him:

> I think, Socrates, that you easily speak ill of people. I would advise you, if you will listen to me, to be careful. Perhaps also in another city, and certainly here, it is easier to injure people than to benefit them. I think you know that yourself.
>
> (94e3–95a1)

Anytus takes Socrates' philosophical prodding to be slander and he responds in anger, which will culminate in Socrates' death.[26]

In contrast, the content of Socrates' belief reflects and encourages open-mindedness.[27] The belief that through rational reflection and collaboration ("I want to examine and seek together with you what it may be," 80d3–4; "I want to inquire along with you into the nature of virtue," 81e2; and "shall we try to find out together what virtue is?" 86c5–6) we can discover important philosophical ideas promotes intellectual curiosity and openness, whereas the belief that rational inquiry is impossible stymies creativity and growth. Additionally, Socrates, unlike Anytus, is willing to hear many diverse viewpoints (in the *Meno*, he draws upon or collaborates with sophists, noblemen, Meno, Anytus, priests and priestesses, a slave, natural scientists, and mathematicians).

5.3.3 Against Abstinence

We have argued that Socrates' practical belief expresses and encourages intellectual humility and open-mindedness, but one might respond that he could have done this without epistemic risk—he could urge us to inquire while abstaining from making a judgment about the possibility of succeeding.

James' response to Clifford is helpful here. Recall that Clifford insists that one ought never to form beliefs without sufficient evidence. As part of his reply, James develops a notion that he calls a "genuine option." An option counts as genuine if it meets three conditions: it must be living, forced, and momentous (WTB 3). A living option is one that is psychologically believable to a specific person. Although the Christian God is a live option for many people today, belief in Apollo is not; however, for the people of Plato's times, the opposite was true (WTB 3). Forced options are unavoidable: the context is such that one must make a decision between a disjunction. James explains that the choice between "Either love me or hate me" is not forced because one can be indifferent, but the choice between "Either accept this truth or go without it" is forced, "for there is no standing place outside of the alternative" (WTB 3). James' point is that in certain contexts withholding judgment essentially amounts to disbelief. John Bishop (2007, 126) helpfully illustrates this idea by contrasting an unforced situation in which he has the option to support, contest, or abstain regarding a colleague's candidacy for promotion with a forced option in which the Dean asks him whether or not he will support his colleague:

> Once the context shifts so that the option becomes forced, positively opposing the promotion and merely abstaining from supporting it—which are otherwise significantly distinct, given that they involve importantly different attitudes on my part—become in practice equivalent: they both amount to not giving support.
>
> (2007, 126–127; cf. Feldman 2006, 23–24; Adler 2002, 120)

The final condition is that the issue in question must be momentous, which means that whichever option one chooses, the results will have serious ramifications for the rest of one's life (WTB 4). According to James, an individual is justified in going *beyond* (not *against*) the evidence in the formation of a belief only if the option in question is genuine (WTB 11, 28).

It is clear that Socrates maintains that the possibility of inquiry is a living and momentous option, but does he consider it forced? Once again, James is helpful here. Let us consider two related passages:

> Our belief in truth itself … that there is a truth, and that our minds and it are made for each other, —what is it but a passionate

> affirmation of desire, in which our social system backs us up? We want to have a truth; we want to believe that our experiments and studies and discussions must put us in a continually better and better position towards it; and on this line we agree to fight out our thinking lives. But if a pyrrhonistic sceptic asks us *how we know* all this, can our logic find a reply? No! certainly it cannot. It is just one volition against another, —we willing to go in for life upon a trust or assumption which he, for his part, does not care to make.
>
> (WTB 9–10)[28]

> Are there not somewhere forced options in our speculative questions, and can we (as men who may be interested at least as much in positively gaining truth as in merely escaping dupery) always wait with impunity till the coercive evidence shall have arrived? It seems *a priori* improbable that the truth should be so nicely adjusted to our needs and powers as that. In the great boarding-house of nature, the cakes and the butter and the syrup seldom come out so even and leave the plates so clean. Indeed, we should view them with scientific suspicion if they did.
>
> (WTB 22)

Two key ideas are expressed in these passages. First, James, like Socrates, maintains that the systematic enterprise of inquiry involves a kind of faith. We don't always have evidence that we will make progress; in reality, many of our attempts will be in vain. Nor do we have evidence, at least of the sort that can appease a radical skeptic, that the facts of the external world reliably conform to our mind ("that nature is akin" to borrow Socrates' phrase). Withholding judgment, for many, would be a psychological barrier to philosophy, and thus if they wish to inquire, they have no choice but to assume things for which they lack objective epistemic grounds.[29]

Second, if our goal were only to avoid falsehood, then abstaining from judgment would certainly be the reasonable choice.[30] But "escaping dupery" might not be our only goal, for we might reasonably have the goal of obtaining truth and the practical goal of being better people. As James observes: "Believe truth! Shun error!—these, we see, are two materially different laws; and by choosing between them we may end by coloring differently our whole intellectual life" (WTB 18). Someone who is never willing to accept a proposition in the absence of clear and compelling evidence is going to have substantially fewer true beliefs, and it is far from clear that this is a better outcome than having more true beliefs but also more falsehood.

Thus, the decision about whether to aim for acquisition of truth or avoidance of falsehood is an "expression of our passional life" (WTB 18)—and always choosing the latter is a form of cowardice:

> It is like a general informing his soldiers that it is better to keep out of battle forever than to risk a single wound. Not so are victories either over enemies or over nature gained. Our errors are surely not such awfully solemn things. In a world where we are so certain to incur them in spite of all our caution, a certain lightness of heart seems healthier than this excessive nervousness on their behalf.
>
> (WTB 19)

James' account provides insight into why Socrates endorses believing in the possibility of inquiry even while observing that his account isn't wholly sufficient. Socrates wants not only to avoid error but also to learn important truths and to become a better person. And with respect to Meno, recommending abstinence would likely feed his intellectual laziness. Thus, given their psychological conditions and goals, the choice is forced between believing in the possibility of philosophical progress or not—for just as disbelief will discourage the things required for them to reach their goals, so too will abstinence.

5.4 Summary

"It is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence," so Clifford famously asserts (EB 77). It is fair to say that Clifford strongly endorses the Epistemic Caution Claim. In this chapter, we have argued that Plato, like James, rejects the Epistemic Caution Claim. Socrates meets Meno's skeptical challenge with a call to overcome idleness and the fear of failure by carrying out the process of inquiry. Of course, adopting such an approach places one at serious risk of falsehood, and perhaps even of devoting one's life to a search for which there are no real answers.

For both Plato and James, part of the justification for carrying out our investigations with optimism is that in so doing we exhibit courage. This approach isn't reckless because it involves intellectual humility and open-mindedness. Both of these help one overcome the two sea monsters of the paradox, the Scylla of thinking that one doesn't need to inquire, and the Charybdis of thinking that the search will be in vain. By recognizing our limitations, we can see the need to search, and by being open-minded, we will not close ourselves off from new ideas and the possibility of success.

Notes

1 We will use the terms "Meno's paradox" and the "paradox of inquiry" synonymously to describe the conjunction of Meno's paradoxical questions and Socrates' dilemma (see Fine 2014, 26–27). Our goal for this chapter isn't to provide a novel reconstruction of the paradox (or to provide a novel account of recollection or knowledge, for that matter) but to explain the psychological and ethical dimensions of the paradox and inquiry in general. Our reconstruction of the paradox will mostly follow Benson 2015, Chap. 2.

2 L. Pangle (2014, 83) aptly writes: "Perhaps this is as good a statement of Socratic ignorance as we get anywhere: it pertains somehow especially to virtue, and consists at bottom in deep suspicion that the essential qualities people attribute to virtue do not in fact come together to characterize any real phenomena any more than the essential features of witches do." That is, underlying this profession of ignorance is the threat of radical skepticism that looms in the paradox of inquiry (see also Scott 1995, 27–28 and 2006, 83–87). This idea also connects to Clitophon's worry that Socrates is only successful at motiving people to pursue virtue, but once one is motivated to do this, Socrates cannot provide much guidance since he doesn't know what virtue is (*Clitophon* 410c–e; see Benson 2015).

3 The reconstruction of Socrates' version follows Benson (2015, 54) with minor modifications (e.g. the names NNP and NHP are our own). Meno's version of the puzzle develops the second prong, providing two reasons for premise 5, the beginning and the ending problem. (Socrates' version only includes the beginning problem.) Some scholars argue that there are significant differences between Socrates' version and Meno's version. The most significant being that Meno's version explicitly mentions being altogether (*parapan*) ignorant, while Socrates' doesn't. They argue that Socrates, thus, substitutes a harder question with an easier one (Moravcsik 1994, 116; Weiss 2001, Chap. 2; Thomas 1980, 123, 128–129; and Scolnicov 1976, 52). For responses, see Benson (2015, 58–63); Nehamas (1994, 228); and White (1994, 168n4). McCabe (2009) argues that the puzzles differ, but that Socrates' version is more difficult to solve. Although we maintain that the difference between the puzzles doesn't amount to anything philosophically significant, this issue doesn't really matter for present purposes because we are interested in the way Socrates appeals to pragmatic reasons for belief. *If* Socrates were replacing a harder question with an easier one, then this would suggest another way in which he is more interested in Meno believing that the conclusion holds, even without sufficient evidence.

4 Recall that Socrates is using "truth" and "argument" in a somewhat extended sense; see Chapters 1 and 4.

5 The things we learned as an unembodied soul must be restricted to conceptual matters (e.g. we were not unembodied when we learned that Bill Russell played for the Boston Celtics); see Moravcsik (1994, 118–119); Guthrie (1975, 250); Phillips (1948, 89); Scott (2006, 96); and Vlastos (1994, 97); cf. Fine (2014, 111–112) and Scott (2006, 103–105).

6 Our position is similar to Weiss' (2001, Chaps. 2–3), although we draw a different conclusion. We agree with Weiss that Socrates' arguments are defective or incomplete in various ways, and that Socrates is more concerned about the state of Meno's soul. We disagree to the extent that we, unlike Weiss, think that Socrates genuinely accepts the account he presents to Meno, he just does this while acknowledging that he doesn't fully understand the details. Though we are not committed to Vlastos' (1994, 103–105) claims about chronology,

we agree that there is a strong element of religious faith running though Plato's argument here.

7 For discussions of this (or a closely related) problem, see Weiss (2001, 70); Scott (2006, 96–97, 114–117); White (1994, 163); Phillips (1948, 90–91); Vlastos (1994, 102–103); Fine (2014, 110–111); and Rohatyn (1980, 70). Benson (2015, 79–82) points out two potential responses to this worry. First, Socrates could deny that all learning is recollection, in which case the unembodied soul could learn via some other means. The problem is that it isn't clear how this other type of learning is supposed to occur prenatally, and being told that the gods teach us is a cheat. Second, the immortal soul talk is Socrates' mythical way of describing how the soul always possesses knowledge. If so, this clearly supports our argument that the belief in these claims extends beyond the evidence (cf. Fine 2014, 110).

8 Ionescu (2006) argues that there is a literal and an allegorical reading of the myth, and that the allegorical reading is more successful than the literal one in several respects. We don't deny that there might be a deeper way to understand the myth; what we deny is that Socrates intends the deeper meaning as a source of motivation for Meno.

9 L. Pangle (2014, 99) writes: "But the slave shows such ignorance and needs Socrates to lead him so carefully, step by step, until he stumbles over the right answer, that the claim that this knowledge was ever present in his mind before Socrates planted it there seems absurd" (see also Guthrie 1975, 255 and Weiss 2001, 96–98).

10 Even if Socrates had established that "all nature is akin," this wouldn't entail that learning values is the same as learning mathematics. It would merely show that all things are related in a systematic and coherent way. It would require a further step to establish that the only way to systematically and coherently conceive of values and mathematics is to conceive of them in such a way that the learning process of each is sufficiently similar. Undoubtedly, part of Plato's larger philosophical project involves establishing this claim; however, it is merely assumed here.

11 Benson (2015, 78) writes: "We moderns may doubt that the immortality of the soul is necessary to account for the fact that knowledge or truth is always present in our soul (mind) … But for Plato, a pre-existent, if not immortal, soul looks necessary" (cf. Scott 2006, 112–120). However, Aristotle (*An. post.* 1.1, 2.19; cf. Fine 2014, 221–225) offers a solution to a version of the knowledge acquisition problem without explicitly appealing to an immortal soul. On the intricacies of nativism in the *Meno*, see Fine (2014, Chap. 5); Scott (1995, 2006, 110–120); and Rawson (2006).

12 Scott (2006, 82, 122–123) argues that an important difference between 81c–e and 86b–c is that 81c–e addresses someone who thinks that inquiry is impossible, while 86b–c addresses someone who thinks that there is no need to inquire because we can't discover what we don't know. From a pragmatic perspective, however, these cases are the same. In both cases, the belief that one can't achieve an intellectual goal is a psychological impediment to working towards that goal.

13 Epictetus reserves some of his harshest condemnation for skeptics: "It's too bad, really. Nature gives a person rules and guidelines to discover the truth, and instead of trying to complement and improve on them, they devote themselves to impugning and rejecting the least little thing that could assist them in the effort … Man, what are you doing? You prove yourself wrong on a daily basis and still you won't give up these idle efforts. When you eat, where do you bring your hand—to your mouth, or to your eye? What do you step into when you bathe? When did you ever mistake your saucepan for a dish,

or your serving spoon for a skewer? … What they lack in gratitude they make up for in gall" (*Disc*. 2.20.21, 27–28).

14 In other words, though the distinction might be there to help the reader resolve the puzzle, it doesn't function as a reason for Meno to think that the puzzle is resolved.

15 Notice, for instance, how Socrates fluctuates between speaking about knowledge being in the slave's soul (85d9–10) and the slave having true beliefs in his soul (86a6–10); cf. Fine (2014, 150–154) and Weiss (2001, 114n80).

16 Relatedly, the puzzle might be resolved by pointing to an equivocation in one of the key words (see McCabe 2009; Weiss 2001, 49–76; Ryle 1976, 7–9; Matthews 1999, 59–60; White 1994; Sprague 1962, 84–86; and Calvert 1974; cf. Benson 2015, 66–72). But because this isn't made explicit to Meno, it cannot function as a reason for Meno.

17 Thanks to Jeremey Reid for helping to clarify this point.

18 Treating serious things as mere intellectual games or ignoring something ethically significant while delighting in learning is what Battaly (2010) refers to as epistemic self-indulgence. Meno is intellectually self-indulgent and lazy in the way that he demands and entertains ideas without seriously considering them (see Scott 2006, 60–65; L. Pangle 2014, 88, 96, and 104). One of Epictetus' deepest concerns about students studying philosophy was that they might trivialize the subject and make it about showing off intellectually; see *Disc*. 2.17.34, 2.19.

19 In *On What Matters* (2011, 2:304), Parfit suggests that if there are no robust mind-independent ethical facts, then he, and philosophers such as Sidgwick and Ross, would have wasted much of their lives.

20 This demonstrates how NHP can actually lead to NNP. If, because of unsuccessful philosophical investigations, one doubts that there are essences, then one might think that the only knowledge to be had is in ordinary use, which one already possesses.

21 The courage to inquire after failure is also a key idea expressed in the *Lac*. 194a (see Dobbs 1986); *Chrm*. 166d; and *Euthphr*. 15c–d.

22 In *On What Matters*, Parfit argues that metanormative views that do not posit irreducible and response-independent normative truths (e.g. expressivism, constructivism, and subjectivism) are close to nihilism (2011, 1:107, 2:368, 2:384, and 2:410).

23 Though Socrates uses the word for courage (*andreia*) here, it is clear from the context that he doesn't mean full-fledged courage but courage-like psychological features; see also *Plt*. 306b–307c; *Leg*. 3.696b; and Baima (2018, 2019).

24 We say "partially correct" because, as we discuss in the next chapter, there are some contexts in which talking to sophists can be beneficial.

25 By recognizing the limits of his own reasoning while still maintaining belief, Socrates is going *beyond* the evidence, but not *against* the evidence (see James WTB 11 and 29).

26 On popular hostility towards sophists and philosophers, see Shaw (2015, Chap. 8).

27 On open-mindedness as a virtue, see Arpaly (2011); Riggs (2010); Adler (2004); and Baehr (2011, 161); cf. Fantl (2018).

28 Around this same time, although with much more pessimism, Nietzsche made a similar point (see GS 5.344 and GM 3.24).

29 In reference to positive psychology, Kahneman writes, "I have always believed that scientific research is another domain where a form of optimism is essential to success: I have yet to meet a successful scientist who lacks the ability to exaggerate the importance of what he or she is doing, and I believe that

someone who lacks a delusional sense of significance will wilt in the face of repeated experiences of multiple small failures and rare successes, the fate of most researchers" (2011, 264).

30 Another question one might have is whether Socrates is recommending a weaker epistemic state like "acceptance" or a low degree of belief (see L. Cohen 1992). Socrates certainly isn't recommending a knowledge claim, but his affirmation of the claim is quite strong, maintaining that he will defend the claim in word and deed at all costs (86c). We leave it to the reader to decide whether this is an endorsement of acceptance or full-fledged belief.

6 Absurdity and Speciousness in the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus*

> My aim is: to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense.
>
> (Wittgenstein, PI 1.464)

In previous chapters, we have demonstrated that the Epistemic Caution Claim is spurious. In Chapter 4 we argued that Socrates endorses risky epistemic behavior as a means of preserving one's integrity, while in Chapter 5 we argued that he advocates believing that one can make progress in inquiry—that a true answer is attainable—even if there is insufficient evidence of this. While our interpretation suggests that Plato's position is far from conservative when it comes to traditional epistemic norms, it is important to stress that he doesn't advocate recklessness. In this chapter, we will elucidate a further layer of complexity in Plato's norms of inquiry by addressing the question of when and to what degree caution is required while engaging in intellectual pursuits. We will articulate a principle that we call the "dichotomy of circumspection principle" (DCP), which states that, somewhat surprisingly, one ought to proceed with greater caution when investigating initially plausible claims made by seemingly trustworthy inquirers than when engaging with dubious ideas or sophistical interlocutors. The discussion will bring to light how various contextual factors affect the norms of inquiry.

Plato's advocacy of DCP is revealed in Socrates' differing attitudes towards inquiry in the *Euthydemus* and the *Protagoras*. In the *Euthydemus*, Socrates is eager to discuss the nature of virtue with the sophist brothers, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus, and he encourages others to do so as well. Yet, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates is cautious and warns Hippocrates about the dangers of inquiry. What explains this variation? We will argue that the difference results from the fact that Euthydemus and Dionysodorus appear to have no intention of getting at the truth, they only seem interested in befuddling their interlocutor via linguistic puzzles, while Protagoras appears interested in the truth and his arguments appear plausible. Socrates urges more caution towards Hippocrates conversing with Protagoras than Clinias conversing with

the sophist brothers because novice philosophers are at a greater risk of developing false beliefs when they engage in inquiry with interlocutors who are seemingly truthful than with interlocutors who are ridiculous. Following this, we will argue that a benefit of preposterous conversations is that they can develop one's ability in logic while also providing a safe forum to practice temperance and courage.

While the previous chapters involved some cross-textual analysis, this chapter centers on it. As a working hypothesis, we assume that textual differences between the *Protagoras* and the *Euthydemus* can be explained by something philosophically meaningful. Although a full defense of this assumption would distract from our main purpose, it is worth noting some of the similarities that make this comparison natural. In both dialogues, Socrates discusses the nature of virtue with at least one sophist for the sake of a young person in front of a crowd. Both conversations explicitly explore the connection between virtue and knowledge/wisdom, while implicitly they examine the difference between sophistry and philosophy.

6.1 The Puzzle

Socrates' attitude towards inquiry appears to differ across two dimensions: (a) in his recommendation to the young and (b) how he himself handles inquiry.

6.1.1 Recommendation to the Young

The *Protagoras* begins with Hippocrates expressing his excitement at the arrival of the renowned sophist, Protagoras. Before daybreak, Hippocrates frantically rushes to Socrates' house, wakes him up, and asks him to talk to Protagoras on his behalf (310a–e). Although Socrates doesn't share Hippocrates' excitement, he agrees to converse with Protagoras once it is light outside. In the meantime, Socrates examines Hippocrates' motivations, asking him what he hopes to learn from Protagoras. Eventually, Hippocrates accepts Socrates' suggestion that what he really hopes to receive is a "general education suitable for a gentleman" (312b3–4). After this, Socrates warns him:

> SOC.: Then do you know what you are about to do now, or does it escape you?
> HIP.: What do you mean?
> SOC.: That you are about to hand over your soul for treatment to a man who is, as you say, a sophist. As to what exactly a sophist is, I would be surprised if you really knew. And yet, if you are ignorant of this, you don't know whether you are entrusting your soul to something good or bad. (312b7–c4)

This leads to an examination of sophistry. Ultimately, they agree that sophists are experts at making people clever (*deinos*) speakers. Nonetheless, it is unclear what subject matter one becomes a clever speaker of by studying with sophists. This uncertainty leads Socrates to issue another warning:

> Do you see what kind of danger you are about to put your soul in? If you had to entrust your body to someone and risk it becoming better or worse, you would consider carefully whether you should entrust it or not, and you would confer with your family and friends for days on end. But when it comes to something you value more than your body, namely your soul, and when everything concerning whether you do well or ill in your life depends on whether it becomes better or worse, I don't see you getting together with your father, your brother, or a single one of your friends to consider whether or not to entrust your soul to this recently arrived foreigner.
>
> (313a1–b2)[1]

Socrates provides an analogy to elucidate the danger of inquiry. Most people who sell food have no idea as to whether what they sell is beneficial or harmful for the body; they simply recommend everything they sell (313d). With the exception of trainers and doctors, most consumers of their products are equally ignorant of their value (313d). The same is true of those who take their teachings from town to town. These people don't know if their teachings are beneficial or harmful to the soul (313d–e). With the exception of physicians of the soul, most individuals are equally ignorant. As Socrates puts it,

> So if you are a knowledgeable consumer, you can buy learning safely from Protagoras or anyone else. But if you are not, please don't risk what is most dear to you on a roll of the dice, for there is a far greater risk in buying learning than in buying foods.
>
> (313e2–314a3)

The risk is greater for two reasons. First, when it comes to food and drink, one can have them examined by an expert before one ingests them, but teachings can't be carried away in a separate container to be examined. "You put down your money and take the teaching away in your soul by having learned, and off you go, either injured or helped" (314b1–4). Second, since the soul is more important than the body, a bad teacher is more dangerous than a bad chef.

Socrates is claiming that students should both know the subject of a teacher's expertise and how this knowledge will benefit them.[2] The exact nature of these constraints is unclear, however. After all, neither Socrates nor Hippocrates claim to understand sophistry or how it can be

beneficial, yet they still converse with Protagoras. Thus, Socrates can't be recommending an absolute prohibition against inquiry when one doesn't know the value of a teacher. We suggest that these constraints determine the amount of skepticism or caution a student should take towards a given situation. The less a student knows about the expert's subject, the more skepticism the student should take, and vice versa. In any case, it is clear that Socrates wants Hippocrates to approach Protagoras carefully. Let us now turn to the *Euthydemus*.

When Socrates initially encounters the sophist brothers, he thinks they are still involved in the military and court (273c, e). They inform him, however, that they are "no longer in earnest about these things," but "treat them as diversions" (273d3–4). Now they focus their time entirely on teaching virtue (273d). This excites Socrates; so he asks for a demonstration. He wants them to persuade young Clinias "that he ought to love wisdom [*philosophein*] and to practice virtue" (275a5–6). After being asked an initial philosophical question by Euthydemus, Clinias blushes and looks to Socrates for help. Socrates responds, "Cheer up, Clinias, and choose bravely whichever seems to you to be the right answer—he may be doing you a very great service" (275d7–e2).

Already we find a difference between the texts. Here we have a passive young man being encouraged to converse with men who may or may not be doing a great service. Socrates does this while acknowledging both that Clinias is at an age when he is vulnerable to influence (275a–b) and that the sophist brothers haven't been studying virtue—a profound subject (273e–274a)—for a great deal of time (271e–272b). If Socrates were following the advice he gave in the *Protagoras*, we might have expected him to recommend greater caution, especially after learning that the questions are rigged (275e and 276e).

Now one might object that once Socrates became aware of the actual motives of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, it was too late to intervene and rescue Clinias—the conversation was already underway. After all, Socrates says as much at 276a, and he does eventually enter the conversation in an attempt to instruct Euthydemus and Dionysodorus on how they ought to converse with the young (277d–278e). This objection is unconvincing for three reasons. First, if Socrates were uncertain about the brothers' qualification to teach virtue, why would he let a young impressionable boy be the test subject—especially while the youth is vulnerable and unsure of himself? It would seem more responsible and safer for Socrates to test the sophists himself. Second, if Socrates really believes that Clinias is being harmed, he should interrupt the conversation even if this is rude. Third, if Socrates didn't approve of the conversation on some level or think that it served a potential benefit, we wouldn't find him endorsing the conversation so frequently.

After Socrates saves Clinias from the "third fall," he gives the brothers a demonstration of how he would like Clinias to be questioned

(1st protreptic, 277d–282d).[3] After this, he releases the boy back to the sophists and they continue with their linguistic puzzles as if they ignored Socrates altogether (2nd eristic, 283a–288b). Socrates, once again, intervenes and gives another demonstration of how to practice philosophy (2nd protreptic, 288b–293a). After this, he turns the conversation back over to the brothers, who continue with their tricks (3rd eristic, 293b–303b). It wouldn't be unreasonable for Socrates to give the brothers the benefit of the doubt for their behavior during the 1st eristic—perhaps they honestly didn't know what kind of demonstration Socrates was interested in seeing. However, after they failed to give a correct demonstration during the 2nd eristic, it would be unreasonable to think that the 3rd eristic would look any different. From this, we can be confident that Socrates is aware of what the brothers are up to and in some way endorses it.

Furthermore, at both the beginning and the end of the dialogue Socrates praises the brothers. In the beginning, he says:

> As to your question about the wisdom [*sophian*] of the pair, it is marvelous, Crito! The two are absolutely omniscient … They have become so skilled in fighting in arguments and in refuting whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true or false. So that I, Crito have a mind to hand myself over to these men, since they can make any other person clever [*deinon*] at the same things in a short time.
>
> (271c5–272b4)

Socrates continues his praise at the end of the dialogue, even after Crito explains that "a man who has a high opinion of himself for wisdom and is one of those clever speople who writes speeches for law courts" (304d5–6) (probably Isocrates) criticized Socrates for his "willingness to put himself at the disposal of men who care nothing about what they say" (305a3–4).[4] Speaking about Socrates' behavior, Crito says, "Now as far as I am concerned, Socrates, the man is wrong to criticize the activity and so is anyone else who does so. But to be willing to argue with such people in front of a large crowd does seem to me worthy of reproach" (305a8–b3). If ever there was an appropriate time to denounce the antics of the brothers, it would surely be now. Nevertheless, rather than criticize the brothers, Socrates criticizes the type of man exemplified by the Critic—that is, the person who occupies "the no-man's-land between the philosopher and the politician" (305c7). This all suggests that Socrates is aware of what he is doing and that he judges it beneficial.[5]

6.1.2 Inquiry

In the two dialogues, Socrates not only advises the young differently, but his general attitude towards inquiry differs as well. In the

Euthydemus, Socrates is willing to tolerate much more from the sophist brothers than he is from Protagoras. Consider the discussion on the relationship between rationality and morality in the *Protagoras*. Socrates wants to know whether people can be sensible and act unjustly (333d). Protagoras thinks that this is possible and Socrates wants some clarification. Protagoras launches into a grand speech in which he defends a kind of species relativism, and the majority of the audience greets it with applause (334a–c). Socrates responds by requesting shorter speeches from Protagoras, claiming both that it is difficult for him to follow long speeches, because of his forgetfulness, and that Protagoras is capable of making excellent short speeches (334c–335a).[6] Viewing Socrates as a verbal opponent, Protagoras refuses to adjust the length of his speeches (335a). Socrates responds by threatening to leave the discussion (335d). Eventually, cooler heads prevail and they reach a compromise (338c–e).

We don't see anything like this in the *Euthydemus*. For example, in the third eristic (293b–303e), instead of targeting the youth, the sophist brothers take aim at Socrates. Several times during the conversation, the brothers restrict Socrates' speech by not allowing him to clarify the question he is being asked. Eventually, Socrates concedes:

> I realized he was angry with me for making distinctions in his phrases, because he wanted to surround me with words and so hunt me down. Then I remembered that Connus, too, is vexed with me whenever I don't give in to him, and that as a result, he takes fewer pains with me because he thinks I am stupid. And since I had made up my mind to attend this man's classes too, I thought I had better give in for fear he might think me too uncouth to be his pupil. So I said, "Well, Euthydemus, if you think this is how to do things, we must do them your way, because you are far more of an expert at discoursing than I, who have merely a layman's knowledge of the art. So go back and ask your questions from the beginning."
>
> (295d1–e3; see also 287d; Schaerer 1938, 27)

Thus, we see that Socrates is willing to tolerate much more in the *Euthydemus* than he is in the *Protagoras*.

This divergence of attitude presents a challenge for interpreters: either we must accept that Socrates' behavior in the *Euthydemus* is reproachable by the standards he sets in the *Protagoras*, or we must explain the relevant differences that account for why his behavior is acceptable. In the next section, we offer an explanation that exculpates him. We do this by articulating key differences between the dialogues that reveal a norm of inquiry that we call the "dichotomy of circumspection principle" (DCP).

> DCP: The more believable an interlocutor or idea appears, the more caution is needed, while the more ridiculous an interlocutor or idea appears, the less caution is needed.

Socrates advocates more caution around Protagoras than around the sophist brothers because Protagoras is more believable than the brothers are. In what follows, we defend this claim by explicating two key conditions that affect believability: (a) the sophist's intention and (b) the content of discussion. We will also present three further conditions that affect the degree of caution required: (c) the method of discussion, (d) the psychological state of the non-sophist interlocutor, and (e) the sophist's position of power.[7]

6.2 Truthfulness and Absurdity

6.2.1 Intention

It is clear that the sophist brothers don't care about the truth but only about winning and humiliating others. However, the same can't be said about Protagoras, for he at least gives the appearance of caring about the truth. The sophist brothers' disregard for the truth is made evident in three main ways. First, Socrates explicitly says that they are not concerned about the truth: "they have become so skilled in fighting in arguments and in refuting whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true or false" (272a7–b1; see also 299b). Second, the brothers openly admit to Socrates in the first eristic that their questions necessarily lead to contradictions (275e). Third, the brothers don't allow Socrates to ask clarificatory questions and severely restrict his ability to answer (287d and 295e).

Although Protagoras certainly wants to impress the crowd and win (317d, 333b–d, 335a–b, 338e, 348a–c, 351d, and 360d–e), it doesn't appear that this is his only interest. In comparison to many of the interlocutors that Socrates talks to, he is gracious and reasonable. This is perhaps clearest after he is defeated by Socrates at the end of the dialogue:

> Socrates, I commend your enthusiasm and the way you find your way through an argument. I really don't think I am a bad man, certainly the last man to harbor ill will. Indeed, I have told many people that I admire you more than anyone I have met, certainly more than anyone in your generation. And I say that I would not be surprised if you gain among men high repute for wisdom.
>
> (361d7–e5)

In comparison to the sophist brothers, Protagoras appears to have some investment in the claims he defends being true. Put in another way, it is far easier to detect that the sophist brothers don't care about the truth than it is to detect that Protagoras doesn't care about the truth. This point is further supported by the next key difference between Protagoras and the sophist brothers: the claims Protagoras makes are more believable than the claims that the brothers make.

6.2.2 Content

Protagoras explicitly defends three theses in the *Protagoras*. The first is that justice and shame (i.e. cooperative virtues and qualities) are shared by all human beings (323c). He defends this claim in two ways. He begins by recounting a myth in which Zeus gives everyone a share of shame and justice. In the myth, Hermes asks Zeus, "Should I establish justice [*dikēn*] and shame [*aidō*] among humans in this way, or distribute it to all?" (322c7–d1). Zeus replies, "To all and let all have a share. For cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these, as is the case with the other arts [*technōn*]. And establish this law as coming from me: death to him who cannot partake of shame and justice, for he is a pestilence to the city" (322d1–5). The lesson of the myth is that cities require cooperation, and successful cooperation can only occur if the civic virtues of justice and shame are possessed en masse (323a).

The second defense of the claim that everyone shares the cooperative virtues is based on the observation that it is generally held that "everyone ought to claim to be just, whether they are or not, and that it is madness not to pretend to be just, since one must have some trace of it or not be a human" (323b5–c2). This attitude towards justice is contrasted with common attitudes towards other arts, such as flute playing, of which it is decent to reveal one's ignorance. This demonstrates that it is generally recognized that possessing some share of cooperative virtues is fundamental to being a decent human being (323a–c). And given this recognition, everyone will aim to possess these traits and presumably succeed to at least some degree.

Protagoras' second thesis is that virtue can be taught. He defends this claim by appealing to our practices of punishment and education, which make sense only if virtue is teachable. Speaking about punishment, he explains that if people weren't capable of learning about ethics, then punishment is merely "exercising the mindless vindictiveness of a beast"; reasonable punishment assumes that the criminal and witness can learn from mistakes so as not to repeat them (324b). Similarly, if learning virtue were not possible, then all the resources and effort put into education would be in vain. As Protagoras says, "When so much care and attention is paid to virtue, both public and private, are you still puzzled about virtue being teachable? The wonder would be if it were not teachable" (326e2–5).

Protagoras' third thesis is that individual virtues do not entail each other. He supports this claim with two pieces of evidence. First, there are some people who possess one virtue but don't possess other virtues (329e, 333d, and 349d).[8] Second, given that good and benefit are relative, it is possible that one can be unjust—yet sensible (334a–c).

Each of these three theses would strike many ancient Greeks as being reasonable; indeed, many people today find them reasonable. Why?

Because they are based on the way things appear to us.[9] To go against these claims would involve going against our ordinary practices and perceptions. In other words, Protagoras defends each claim with evidence that the many already accept. For example, most people believe that teaching virtue is possible—for if we deny that it is possible, then we must accept that our educational policies are predicated on a falsehood. Most people will be reluctant to accept this since it implies that we have wasted a tremendous amount of time, effort, and money. Further, when a belief has been widely held in society for generations, there is a strong burden of proof on anyone who would claim that so many people have been mistaken for so long.

Some scholars have argued that Protagoras implicitly accepts hedonism and the possibility of *akrasia*.[10] Our interpretation doesn't depend on this reading but would be further supported by it. This is because common experience seems to support both hedonism and *akrasia*. Human beings are naturally disposed to seek pleasure, and this in turn disposes us to believe that pleasure is good. From here it is only a small step to identifying pleasure as the Good (see *Resp*. 6.505b).[11] Likewise, when Socrates introduces the possibility of *akrasia* he claims that most people accept it (352c–353a; see also *Eth. Nic.* 7.2145b25–1145b30).

In contrast to Protagoras, the sophist brothers defend claims that few people hold and that go against ordinary experience. Below is a sampling of some of the claims that the sophists make in the *Euthydemus*:

1. Wishing to become wise implies wishing for death. (283d)
2. It is impossible to lie. (285e)
3. Contradiction doesn't exist. (286e)
4. False belief doesn't exist. (286d)
5. Ignorance doesn't exist. (286d)
6. If you know one thing, you know everything. (293c)
7. Ctesippus' father is a dog. (298e)[12]

6.2.3 Method

The methodology of the brothers and Protagoras is fundamentally different.[13] Euthydemus and Dionysodorus practice an intellectual game by which they refute interlocutors. They ask interlocutors a standard set of questions, which will lead to a contradiction no matter how they are answered. In contrast, Protagoras teaches via lecture, which differs from sophistical refutation in that it aims to impart concrete lessons to the student. Much like how a patient receives prescriptions from a doctor, a student receives lessons from a lecturer, and her soul is affected for good or bad (*Prt*. 313d–314b). No doubt, there are dangers to eristic, as we will discuss further below. But the student being lectured to is far more vulnerable than the interlocutor being questioned, since the former

is being taught positive teachings, while the latter is merely being intellectually challenged. Put differently, Clinias is a participant in a game, whereas Hippocrates is a receiver of "wisdom."

6.2.4 Interlocutor's Psychological State

A fourth factor that affects the level of caution required is the psychological state of the non-sophist interlocutor. Although both Hippocrates and Clinias are young, they are drawn to different individuals: Clinias admires Socrates, while Hippocrates admires Protagoras. Evidence of this is that in the undressing room Clinias chooses to sit by Socrates and not the sophists (*Euthyd*. 273b–c). It is Socrates who tells Clinias that he should talk to Dionysodorus and Euthydemus (273c, 275a–b), and it is Socrates to whom Clinias looks when he struggles to answer the first question (275d). However, the same isn't true of Hippocrates; rather than looking to Socrates for guidance, Hippocrates turns to Protagoras. The fact that Hippocrates is comfortable approaching Socrates at hours in which he is unsure whether he is asleep or awake (*Prt*. 310b) suggests that they have a pretty good rapport. Yet, instead of being thrilled to speak to Socrates, Hippocrates wants to use him as a means to gain access to Protagoras' wisdom (310e–311c). This helps explain why more caution is needed with someone like Hippocrates and why less caution is needed with Clinias. If Hippocrates is already eager to learn from Protagoras, then he runs the risk of unreflectively accepting what he says. However, since Clinias is not eager to speak to the sophist brothers, this is less of a risk for him. This is also likely one of the reasons why Socrates recommends that Crito study with the brothers. Since Crito is skeptical about the brothers' "wisdom," it is unlikely that he will unreflectively accept what they are teaching.

6.2.5 Position of Power

A final factor that affects the risks associated with engaging with sophists is their position of power. This is something that Socrates explains in the *Philebus*:

> All those who combine this delusion with weakness and are unable to avenge themselves when they are laughed at, you are justified in calling ridiculous. But as for those who do have the power and strength to take revenge, if you call them dangerous and hateful, you are getting exactly the right conception about them. For ignorance on the side of the strong and powerful is odious and ugly; it is harmful even for their neighbors, both the ignorance itself and its imitations, whatever they may be. Ignorance on the side of the weak, by contrast, deserves to be placed among the ridiculous in rank and nature.
>
> (49b6–c5)

This distinction is useful because it further qualifies conditions in which speech is silly or dangerous: when one is in a position of power, one's ignorance is more dangerous than when one is not. In the law court or politics, people like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus might be dangerous, but in their present position, they are just ridiculous.

6.3 The Norms of Inquiry

We argued that Socrates is more cautious with Protagoras than the sophist brothers. After this, we discussed key differences that make Protagoras more believable than the sophist brothers. If we accept that these key differences explain why Socrates is more cautious with Protagoras than with the sophist brothers, then Plato accepts DCP. But why think that these key differences provide such an explanation? There is no way of establishing this kind of cross-dialogue comparative claim with certainty—such comparisons always involve some degree of speculation. Nonetheless, there are three points in favor of our account: (1) DCP is plausible in itself, (2) it is in line with other Platonic commitments, and (3) it explains why Socrates is more critical of the anonymous Critic than he is of the sophist brothers.

6.3.1 The Dichotomy of Circumspection Principle

At first glance, DCP might seem implausible. After all, it seems like the inverse should be true; that is, the more sincere and plausible a claim appears, the less caution is needed, while the more spurious a position and its proponent seem, the more caution is needed. However, upon reflection it becomes clear that this isn't the case. If most people believe that claim *X* is absurd and that even the person asserting *X* doesn't believe it, then very few people are at risk of adopting *X* or related claims. This is because claims that strike us as absurd generally don't cohere with other commitments we hold. For example, most people believe that contradiction is possible. So, if someone proposes that contradiction is impossible, most people will be skeptical.

Additionally, we generally distrust people who assert things that they don't appear to believe; persuasive liars don't appear to be lying. This is the essence of George Costanza's advice to Jerry Seinfeld on the hit television show *Seinfeld*. Jerry is preparing to pass a lie detector test and he turns to the best liar he knows for guidance. George, being that person, tells Jerry, "It's not a lie if you believe it." The implicit suggestion is that if Jerry really wants to convince others that he is being honest, he ought to try to convince himself of the truth of his claims. This advice is reasonable because we are not prone to believing people who don't appear sincere. Because we are generally resistant to believing such people, engaging with them is fairly innocuous. In contrast, we are likely to believe people who appear sincere

and to accept claims that mesh with beliefs we already hold. Thus, adhering to DCP protects us from unreflectively accepting false beliefs.

Evidence in support of DCP is also found in the *Phaedrus*.[14] Socrates reports that many rhetoricians believe that they have "no need to know the truth about the things that are just or good" since "no one in a law court cares at all about the truth of such matters. They only care about what is convincing" (*pithanou*) (272d7–e1). Socrates explains that what is convincing is what is "likely" (*to eikos*) (272e1) and the "likely" is "what is accepted by the crowd" (τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ τὸ τῷ πλήθει δοκοῦν) (273b1). This supports the claim that Socrates is concerned that what appears true to the majority of people (i.e. the likely) puts us at risk of cultivating false beliefs. Indeed, we also find this idea in the *Protagoras*. In the section on *akrasia*, Socrates explains that it is "the art of measurement" (*hē metrētikē technē*), not "the power of appearance" (*hē tou phainomenou dunamis*) (356d4), that should guide us—for the power of appearance leads us astray (356d–e).

Which beliefs concern Plato, and how does DCP prevent the acquisition of these dangerous beliefs? In general, Plato is suspicious about the ethical beliefs held by the many, given that the many base their beliefs on the appearance of things. Examples of this include:

i. We can get reliable information about ethics from anybody.
ii. Reason is weaker than affect/emotion.
iii. Wealth is good.
iv. Death is bad.
v. Suffering injustice is worse than committing injustice.
vi. Going unpunished for injustice is better than receiving punishment.[15]

A primary benefit of DCP is that it helps prevent us from accepting claims like these.

Not only is DCP plausible and in line with other Platonic commitments, but it also explains why Socrates would be harder on the anonymous Critic than on the sophist brothers. Consider Socrates' description of the people who occupy the "no-man's-land":

> SOC.: They think that they are the wisest of people, and that they not only are but also seem to be so in the eyes of a great many, so that no one else keeps them from enjoying universal esteem except the followers of philosophy. Therefore, they think that if they place these persons in the position of appearing to be worth nothing, then victory in the contest for the reputation of wisdom will be indisputably and immediately theirs, and in the eyes of all … Yes, their conceit of wisdom is quite natural because they think they have as much of each as they need; and, keeping clear of both risk and conflict, they reap the fruits of wisdom. (305c7–e2)

> CR.: And so, Socrates, do you think there is anything in what they say? For surely it can't be denied that their argument has a certain plausibility [*euprepeian*]. (305e3–4)
>
> SOC.: Plausibility is just what it does have, Crito, rather than truth. (305e5–a1)

In this passage, we see that the person who is in the no-man's-land is popular and avoids situations in which he faces challenges. These people are more dangerous than Euthydemus and Dionysodorus because their reputation is greater. Furthermore, by avoiding intellectual challenges, people who occupy the no-man's-land can better conceal what they really are. Even though Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are ridiculous and restrict the types of dialogue they allow, they don't conceal their intentions—they wear them on their cloak. Their explicit goal is to get their interlocutor to contradict himself, and they will unabashedly go to any length to achieve this.

Indeed, one key difference between the sophist brothers and many of Socrates' interlocutors is that the brothers are not ashamed to defend any position (see esp. 294d). Although it is true that they are ashamed to contradict themselves (see 297a), this is significantly different from many other Socratic interlocutors. For example, in the *Gorgias*, speaking to Callicles about Gorgias and Polus, Socrates says:

> I know well that if you concur with what my soul believes, then that is the very truth. I realize that a person who is going to put a soul to an adequate test to see whether it lives rightly or not must have three qualities, all of which you have: knowledge, good will, and frankness. I run into many people who aren't able to test me because they're not wise like you. Others are wise, but they're not willing to tell me the truth, because they don't care for me the way you do. As for these two visitors, Gorgias and Polus, they're both wise and fond of me, but rather more lacking in frankness, and more ashamed than they should be. No wonder! They've come to such a depth of shame that, because they are ashamed, each of them dares to contradict himself, face to face with many people, and on topics of the greatest importance.
>
> (486e5–487b5; see also 461b and 482d–e)

The difference between people like Polus and Gorgias and the sophist brothers is that defending certain claims causes Polus and Gorgias to be ashamed, and this leads them to contradict themselves, while the brothers are not ashamed to defend any position but are ashamed to contradict themselves.[16]

6.3.2 Benefits of Absurdity

Supposing we are right that seemingly truthful conversations are more dangerous than absurd conversations, this still leaves the question of what one stands to gain from talking to people like Euthydemus and

Dionysodorus. Even if it isn't risky, might it still be a waste of time? Not necessarily. There are two benefits of talking to ridiculous people (who are not in a position of power). First, one can learn about logic in an innocuous situation.[17] Even a novice in logic will suspect that something is fishy about the arguments that the brothers present, and it is important to figure out what exactly is wrong. For example, in the third eristic the brothers present the following argument:

1. The dog is a father.
2. The dog is yours.
3. Therefore, the dog is your father. (299e)

Given basic facts about biology, we know that dogs don't father humans. So, the silliness of the example allows us to explore fallacies without the risk of cultivating false beliefs or bad dialectical habits. This wouldn't be true had the brothers presented the seemingly good form of this argument:

1. The dog is a pet.
2. The dog is yours.
3. Therefore, the dog is your pet.

If happiness (*eudaimonia*) depends on having the correct commitments, and logical fallacies can thwart these commitments, then one ought to learn to detect these fallacies. As Aristotle says in the *Sophistical Refutations*, "[I]t is the business of one who knows a thing himself to avoid falsities in the subjects which he knows and to be able to show up the man who makes them; and of these accomplishments the one depends on the faculty to produce an answer, and the other upon the faculty to exact one" (1.165a24–28). Aristotle isn't alone in emphasizing the importance of understanding sophistry. As Eric Brown explains:

> It is reported that Zeno "compared the skill of dialecticians to those just measures that measure not wheat or any other worthy thing but chaff and crap" (Stobaeus 2.2.12). Zeno was not denigrating the dialecticians; having a good crap-detector is no paltry thing. Indeed, it is *necessary* to have the argumentative skills of the eristics and dialecticians if knowledge is, as Zeno and the Stoics hold, "stable, firm, and unshakeable by reason or argument."
>
> (Brown "Socrates the Stoic? Rethinking Protreptic, Eudaimonism, and the Role of the Socratic Dialogues," 27)[18]

The second benefit that one can receive from engaging with people like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus is the development of temperance and courage. Although the *Euthydemus* isn't overtly about courage and temperance, the importance of these virtues is a key theme in the dialogue. In many ways, Socrates is engaging with the sophist brothers for the benefit

of Clinias, and he is retelling the story for the benefit of Crito. Clinias and Crito are similar in that they are both at a crossroads. Both are drawn to philosophy, but they lack a full commitment. Clinias being young and beautiful, with many admirers, could easily be flattered away from philosophy (275a–b; see also *Resp*. 6.496b–c and 7.538d). Crito admires Socrates, and when he is with him, he admires philosophy. However, Crito's concern for wealth and reputation inhibit him from committing to philosophy (see Plax 2000). We see this in both Crito's reaction to the anonymous Critic (305b; see also 272b and *Cri*. 45d–e) and his concern about his children being wealthy and married (306d–307a; see also *Cri*. 44b–d).

The comments of Crito and the anonymous Critic (see esp. 305b–c) call to mind Callicles' snide remarks about philosophy:

> To partake of as much philosophy as your education requires is an admirable thing, and it's not shameful to practice philosophy while you're a boy, but when you still do it after you've grown older and become a man, the thing gets to be ridiculous, Socrates! My own reaction to men who philosophize is very much like that to men who speak haltingly and play like children.
>
> (*Grg*. 485a5–b2; see also Isoc. *Antid*. 15.261–9; *Panath*. 12.26–29; and *C. soph*. 13.1)[19]

Socrates is trying to teach Crito and Clinias that they shouldn't be ashamed to engage in these types of conversations—no matter if it leads to a poor reputation. This is why when Clinias was struggling to answer the brothers, Socrates told him to "cheer up and choose bravely" (275d7–e2). It is also why Socrates speaks about the manliness of the brothers. Consider the following passage:

> And there was practically nothing Ctesippus did not ask them about in the end, inquiring shamelessly whether they knew the most disgraceful things. The two of them faced his questions very manfully [*andreiotata*], claiming to know in each case, just like boars when they are driven up to attack. The result was that even I myself, Crito, was finally compelled, out of sheer disbelief, to ask whether Dionysodorus even knew how to dance, to which he replied that he certainly did.
>
> (294d3–e1; cf. *La*. 197a–c)[20]

Unlike the anonymous Critic (305d–e) and other characters in Plato's dialogues, the brothers neither cower from public disputes nor abandon their position out of shame (cf. 297a)—rather, they stick to their ridiculous claims in the face of social pressure. This, of course, isn't full-blown courage. Plato makes this clear when he compares the brothers to

boars and openly mocks them at the end of their display (303c–304b). Nevertheless, this quality applied to something like virtue or (good) philosophy would be excellent.[21] One way of cultivating this quality is to engage with ridiculous eristics in public forums.[22]

Similarly, one can cultivate temperance by keeping one's cool while talking to such people (see LeMoine 2015). In dealing with eristics, one risks becoming frustrated and angry. This is best seen in how Ctesippus reacts to the brothers. At the beginning of the dialogue, we are told that Ctesippus has "a certain youthful brashness [*hubristēs*]" (273a8–b1), and we get to see this once the brothers accuse him of wanting Clinias to die (283e; see also 284e–285a, 288a–b, 294d, and 299a). Anyone who has conversed with an internet troll can sympathize with Ctesippus—the brothers are far from charitable interlocutors, and it would be easy to become frustrated with them. Fortunately, this dialogue gives us a clue as to how we should deal with these people: almost every time the tensions get high, Socrates uses humor or treats the conversation as a joke to mitigate the conflict (the exception being 302c). For example, Socrates twice says that the brothers are not giving a serious display but are merely joking (277d–278e and 288b–e). Moreover, when Ctesippus and the brothers start to get "pretty rough with each other," Socrates starts to "joke" and says:

> Ctesippus, I think we ought to accept what the strangers tell us, if they are willing to be generous, and not to quarrel over a word. If they really know how to destroy men so as to make good and sensible people out of bad and stupid ones … then let us concede them the point and permit them to destroy the boy for us and make him wise [*phronimon*]—and do the same to the rest of us as well.
>
> (285a3–b7; see also 297b–d)

Towards the end of the dialogue, it is evident that this approach rubs off on Ctesippus:

> Then, I [Socrates], lay speechless, just as if the argument had struck me a blow. But Ctesippus ran to my aid, saying, "Bravo, Heracles, what a fine argument!" And Dionysodorus said, "Is Heracles a bravo, or is a bravo Heracles?" And Ctesippus said, "By Poseidon, what marvelous arguments! I give up—the pair are unbeatable." Whereupon, my dear Crito, there was no one there who did not praise to the skies the argument and the two men, laughing and applauding and exulting until they were nearly exhausted. In the case of each and every one of the previous arguments, it was only the admirers of Euthydemus who made such enthusiastic uproar; but now it almost seemed as if the pillars of the Lyceum applauded the pair and took pleasure in their success.
>
> (303a4–b7)

Through the use of humor, we can assuage our anger and endure those who are ridiculous. Given that the world (especially the internet) is full of such people, this advice is quite beneficial.[23]

6.3.3 Abusing Arguments and Bad Reputations

Before closing this chapter, two related worries merit consideration. The first is that, in the *Republic*, Socrates gives a clear warning against practicing argumentation. In Book 7, he warns:

> And isn't it one lasting precaution not to let them taste arguments while they're young? I don't suppose that it has escaped your notice that, when young people get their first taste of argument, they misuse it by treating it as a kind of game of contradiction [*antilogian*]. They imitate those who've refuted them by refuting others themselves, and, like puppies, they enjoy dragging and tearing those around them with their arguments.
>
> (7.539a11–b6)

One might wonder how this warning is compatible with the claim that engaging with ridiculous eristics is beneficial. After all, in the *Euthydemus*, we see Ctesippus mimic the eristics at the end of the dialogue (298c, 299e, 299e–300d, and 303e–304a; cf. *Lysis* 211b–c).[24]

We have two replies. First, it is important to keep in mind that the context of the *Republic* differs significantly from the *Euthydemus*. In the *Republic*, the designers of the city can largely control the experiences of the citizens, but this isn't the case in the *Euthydemus*. As a result, we shouldn't expect the norms in the *Republic* to align exactly with the norms in the *Euthydemus*. Indeed, we should expect that the norms outside of the *Republic* take into account less than ideal situations and people. In a society that is, unlike the Kallipolis, relatively free and open, one will be exposed to a variety of people and viewpoints. Thus, it is imperative that one learn not only how to recognize fallacies in reasoning and plausible ideas, but also how to engage with others in fair and productive discussions. In contrast, within a highly structured and carefully organized society like the Kallipolis, not everyone needs to cultivate these skills; many can simply rely on the structure of the city for guidance.

Second, condition (d) (i.e. the psychological state of the non-sophist interlocutor) guards against the danger of imitating eristics. Socrates is aware that Clinias admires him and not the eristics. Additionally, Socrates is aware that Crito doesn't see much value in the practice of the brothers. What could benefit Crito is more engagement with eristics rather than more warnings about their danger. This, of course, doesn't account for Ctesippus and the rest of the spectators, but perhaps Socrates trusts that they will follow his philosophical lead—Ctesippus' appearance at

Socrates' last day in prison should give us some confidence in this regard (*Phd*. 59b).

The second worry is that ridiculous eristics give philosophy a bad reputation and that this makes it less likely that one will practice philosophy.[25] After all, Crito and the Critic refer to the activity of the sophist brothers as philosophy (304e–305a);[26] thus, they aren't able to distinguish between the philosophy practiced by Socrates and the philosophy practiced by the brothers.[27] If Socrates hopes to persuade people to practice philosophy, then shouldn't he avoid endorsing those who give philosophy a bad name?

It is doubtful that Socrates would take a positive stance towards eristics if he really thought that this would decrease the influence of philosophy in society. So we need an explanation for why he was not worried about this. A plausible explanation arises when we consider that there are broadly two types of people who choose not to pursue philosophy. The first type are those who lack sufficient interest in the pursuit of virtue and wisdom because they focus too much on external goods such as money, power, and prestige. The Critic, Callicles, Anytus (*Meno* 91c–92c), and Crito—each in their own way—are examples of such individuals (see Shaw 2015, 192–199 and Weiss 1998, 43–49). Engagement with eristics is unlikely to negatively affect such people's inclination towards philosophy because their faulty evaluative commitments already prevent them from having the appropriate attitude towards this subject.

The second type of person who rejects philosophy are those who care about virtue and wisdom, but who believe that philosophy is an ineffective means of pursuing these goods. Such skepticism about philosophy is likely facilitated by witnessing sophists in action and mistakenly associating their insincerity and abrasiveness with genuine philosophy. While this is certainly a problem, the best remedy is not to simply ignore eristics and hope that their effects are minimal. Since the eristics are going to be practicing their craft anyway, the best way to protect philosophy's reputation is for those who are sincere in their philosophical efforts to engage with them. This will allow people like Socrates to demonstrate how someone with a truly philosophical approach can benefit from such discussions and to provide relevant lessons on how to properly conduct oneself in inquiry.

One such lesson is especially pertinent in this context. It is crucial that we train ourselves to assess subjects and crafts based on their inherent merits rather than the individuals who happen to be practicing them (or purport to be practicing them). In Socrates' words:

> Then don't do what you ought not to, Crito, but pay no attention to the practitioners of philosophy, whether good or bad. Rather give serious consideration to the thing itself: if it seems to you negligible, then turn everyone from it, not just your sons. But if it seems to you

> to be what I think it is, then take heart, pursue it, practice it, both you and yours, as the proverb says.
>
> (307b6–c4)

6.4 Summary

In this chapter we have explained various contextual features that affect the Platonic norms of inquiry. These features centered on DCP, which holds that we ought to be more cautious with respect to claims and people that appear more believable and less cautious with those that appear less believable.

This concludes Part II. In these three chapters, we developed our case against the Epistemic Caution Claim by examining evidence from four dialogues: the *Phaedo*, the *Meno*, the *Protagoras*, and the *Euthydemus*. We proposed novel solutions to multiple interpretive puzzles, and in the process we revealed that Plato is quite open to epistemic risk under the right circumstances. Consideration of the relevant contextual factors revealed four key Platonic norms of inquiry:

1. Dichotomy of Circumspection: The more believable an interlocutor or idea appears, the more caution is needed, while the more ridiculous an interlocutor or idea appears, the less caution is needed—in some cases it is even beneficial to engage with ridiculous individuals.
2. Justified Epistemic Risk: Intentionally risking false belief can be justified as a means of protecting one's character and integrity, as well as promoting virtue in others.
3. Pragmatic Faith: The search for truth often requires a type of faith—one can be justified in believing that an inquiry will succeed even in the absence of clear evidence to support this belief.
4. Skill-Based Risk Assessment: The amount of epistemic risk that is permissible depends not only on the potential rewards, but also on one's epistemic ability and character: the greater one's ability and character, the more one can wager.

In Part III, we'll turn our attention to the Philosopher Claim. Are falsehood and epistemic risk beneficial only for the layperson? Or can even philosophers and gods benefit from a pragmatic approach?

Notes

1 This passage is echoed by Epictetus in the *Handbook*: "If your body was turned over to just anyone, you would doubtless take exception. Why aren't you ashamed that you have made your mind vulnerable to anyone who happens to criticize you, so that it automatically becomes confused and upset?" (28).
2 If this prescription is taken seriously, this will lead to what is called the "credentials problem": non-moral experts are the only ones who need to seek

out moral experts, yet, because they are not experts themselves, they lack the knowledge to determine if a person is truly a moral expert or not. Hence, determining moral expertise appears to be an insurmountable problem (see Cholbi 2007).

3 In ancient Greek wrestling, a wrestler could achieve victory by throwing his opponent down three times. The allusion to wrestling signifies that the argumentative style of the sophist brothers is both combative and playful.

4 For a helpful discussion and review of scholarship on the identity of the Critic, see Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 143–151).

5 Chance (1992, see esp. the epilogue and conclusion) argues that Socrates is making a stand against the sophist brothers; we disagree: Socrates is actually rather passive towards them and is more critical of the Critic. For a defense of the view that Socrates in some sense appreciates the sophist brothers, see Gonzalez (1998, 127–128) and Landy (1998); cf. Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 130n221). Note that we are not denying that Socrates is being somewhat ironic; our view is that his ironic praise contains elements of sincerity.

6 The fact that Socrates is capable of memorizing Simonides' poem (339b) suggests that his real reason for requesting a shorter speech has little to do with his memory. For a fascinating discussion on Socrates' interpretation of Simonides, see Austin (2017).

7 The appearance of the divine sign might play an important role in getting Socrates to stay in the *Euthydemus* (272e); nonetheless, we contend that there are still rational reasons why he is engaging with these men and why such an engagement is beneficial.

8 At 333c, Protagoras says he would be ashamed to admit the popular view that one can be both sensible and unjust; however, at 329e, he admitted that many are brave but unjust, and many are just but unwise. If he accepts that one can be just and unwise, it seems likely that he actually accepts that one can be unjust and sensible.

9 The "measure" doctrine is similar in that it is motivated by the fact that things appear different to different people (see *Tht*. 151d–186e).

10 For a recent book-length defense of this reading, see Shaw (2015). For a helpful overview of the various positions on hedonism in the *Protagoras*, see Wilburn (2016, 224n1–225n2).

11 Arguments along these lines are put forth by Epicurus; see Annas (1993, Chap. 7); Bentham (PML Chap. 1.1); and Mill (*Util*. Chap. 4). Sidgwick's defense of hedonism is based partly on an appeal to common sense (*Methods* 396). For recent defenses of hedonism based on common experience and introspection, see Crisp (2006, 124) and Sinhababu "The Epistemic Argument for Hedonism."

12 For a more complete account of the arguments of the brothers, see Hawtrey (1981, 2–3) and Chance (1992, App. 2). One might challenge the plausibility of DCP by pointing out that it implies that we ought to be very cautious of the negations of 1–7 because these claims are very plausible and that this is problematic because these claims don't warrant caution. However, if we simply assume basic truths about contradictions and lying without inquiring further, then we will likely lose out on important examinations concerning language, logic, and metaphysics.

13 We thank Nicholas Smith for emphasizing this point to us.

14 Thanks to Rebecca LeMoine for alerting us to this passage.

15 For (i), see *Prt*. 319a–328d and *Cri*. 44d, 47a–48a, as well as Socrates' general distrust of the many in the *Republic*. For (ii), see *Prt*. 352c–353a. For (iii), see the description of the body in the *Phd*. There Socrates explains that the body desires food, sex, drink, wealth, and honor, and these desires develop as a result

of relying on the appearance of things (65d–69e and 79c–84b). Discussion of (iv) is found in *Phd*. 61c–69e, 79c–84b, 117a–e; *Grg*. 511a–513d, 522b–e; and *Ap*. 28b–30b. For (v) and (vi), see *Grg*. 474b–481b.

16 Callicles, like Polus and Gorgias, is ashamed to defend certain claims; however, unlike them, Callicles doesn't abandon his claims in order to avoid contradiction (see 494e–495c; Kahn 1983). Shaw (2015, Chaps. 3–4) argues that Protagoras, like Gorgias, Polus, and Callicles, is ashamed to defend certain claims, such as the possibility of *akrasia*.

17 Many commentaries have argued that eristic is beneficial for how it allows one to learn about logic (see Hawtrey 1981, 20). The position we take here qualifies this by asserting that we should learn about logic by conversing with *ridiculous* eristics.

18 For conceptions of this view of knowledge, see Stobaeus 2.7.5l; *Diog. Laert.* 7.47; Sextus *Math*. 7.151; Pseudo-Galen *SVF* 2.93; Philo *SVF* 2.95; cf. Cicero *Acad*. 1.41–42; references are from E. Brown unpublished-a.

19 As Shaw (2015, 138–140) points out, Callicles and Crito (in the *Crito*) have pretty much the same concern for reputation, and Socrates responds to their concerns in the same way.

20 C. Zuckert (2009, 501) argues that Socrates is trying to teach Crito that he needs to be willing to look ridiculous, exposing his ignorance so that he might learn. LeMoine (2015, 50) argues, "For both Crito and the speechwriter, the risk of engaging sophists lies in damaging one's reputation. One senses, however, that whereas the speechwriter fears he will not be able to outwit the sophists at their own game, Crito fears he will not be unscrupulous enough to play the game at all." Although we are sympathetic to both readings, we don't think either is exactly right. Crito doesn't look down on conversing with eristics because they will expose his ignorance, nor is he afraid of behaving unscrupulously; rather, he looks down on the activity because it isn't suitable for aristocratic men to talk about things that appear frivolous to other aristocratic men.

21 Indeed, this is one of the defining qualities of Socrates—he doesn't care what the many think of him and philosophy (see esp. *Cri* 47b–c; *Grg*. 522d–e; *Ap*. 28b; and *Resp*. 5.450d–451b; cf. *Resp*. 6.506d–e; see also Epictetus, *Hand*. 22).

22 This follows Plato's account of how one develops shame, temperance, and courage in the *Laws*. At 1.633b–650b, the Athenian argues that one cultivates these qualities by being put in situations in which one is vulnerable to acting disgracefully; with practice and the correct teachers, one can learn to endure and act nobly when one is susceptible to vice (see Baima 2017a and 2018).

23 Humor has proven an effective way of removing dangerous honor rituals from society. For instance, younger generations laughing at grown men dueling strongly discouraged men from wanting to partake (see Stevens 1940, 280–283; see also Pinker 2011, Chap. 1). For a discussion of humor as a Stoic technique for responding to insults, see Irvine (2009, 147–148 and 162).

24 This worry is similar to the misology worry discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, although different in an important respect. Misology arises when one trusts arguments too much, whereas this type of problem arises because one finds pleasure in showing others to be wrong.

25 One might, for example, think of the way Aristophanes' *Clouds* negatively affects the reputation of Socrates and philosophy (see *Ap*. 18c–d, 19b–c; Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 95, 132, 153, 189–190; Palpacelli 2009, 243–245; Adkins 1970; D. Adams 2014; Newell 1999; M. Zuckert 1984; Nussbaum 1980; and Petrie 1911). For a discussion of how Socrates resembles the sophists, see Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 44–47). We thank Rachel Singpurwalla and Hugh Benson for this objection.

26 Crito introduces the idea; the Critic goes along with it. There is an interesting question as to why Socrates doesn't point out to Crito that what these men are doing isn't philosophy. Perhaps he thinks bad philosophy still counts as philosophy (see 305d1–2; Peterson 2011, 200–201; cf. Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi 2014, 143n243), or maybe he hopes Crito will discover the difference himself. A third possibility is that he wants Crito to find some value in what they are doing and so he avoids disparaging them. It is unclear as to whether the Critic is able to distinguish between both activities. Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi (2014, 141n238) notes that "if the unnamed man did not distinguish between Socrates' and the sophists' methods, it would appear odd that he criticizes only the sophists for their method, while Socrates only for interacting with such worthless men." However, the Critic doesn't seem all that discerning a person.

27 One might take Socrates' recommendation that the brothers practice their conversations in private as evidence that he doesn't want them talking in public (303e–304b). However, this isn't the case: when Socrates tells them not to talk in public, he is playfully mocking them—because their practice is so easy to imitate, they had better restrict who can see it if they hope to make money off it.

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Part III

Commoners, Rulers, and Gods

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7 Philosophers, Soul Parts, and False Beliefs in the *Republic*

> The confidence that individuals have in their beliefs depends mostly on the quality of the story they can tell about what they see, even if they see little.
> (Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* 87)

> Having once surrendered blind belief, it is impossible to return to it, for the essence of such belief is to be unconscious of itself. As soon as this unconsciousness ceases it is shattered like a glass whose fragments cannot be again reunited except by being cast again into the furnace and refashioned.
> al-Ghazālī, *Confessions* 20–21)

In Parts I and II, we argued that, for Plato, falsehood is sometimes preferable to truth, and that epistemic risks are sometimes worth taking. In response to this, the Alethist might push back and say, "Even if Plato holds these views, this could only be with respect to non-philosophers." This reply is an articulation of what we have labeled the "Philosopher Claim." Part of the motivation for this claim is the thought that it would be strange for the wisest citizens, who have knowledge of the Forms, to not only believe but also benefit from believing lies as far-fetched as the myth of metals. Moreover, it would be surprising if the most virtuous individuals, the ones who are most devoted to truth, ever needed or wanted to risk believing based on insufficient evidence. In short: how could falsehoods and epistemic risks ever be useful for philosophers?[1]

We have already provided some evidence against the Philosopher Claim. As we saw in both Chapters 4 and 5, Socrates is willing to take epistemic risks for the sake of practical benefits: in Chapter 4 this occurred via motivated reasoning, while in Chapter 5 this involved pragmatic faith. Although Socrates is not equivalent to the philosopher-rulers of the *Republic*, he is the closest embodiment of that ideal. The fact that the most philosophical character in the dialogues is presented as being justified in believing without sufficient evidence reduces the force of the Philosopher Claim. If Socrates can benefit from risking falsehood for the sake of practical benefits, then, presumably, a philosopher can sometimes benefit from falsehoods that produce certain practical effects.

In this chapter, we further develop our case against the Philosopher Claim by arguing that the beneficial falsehoods of the *Republic* are fundamental to philosophers' virtuous dispositions. More precisely, we argue that philosophers believe the falsehoods of the noble lie in the non-reasoning part of their souls, and that these false beliefs have positive ethical value because the non-reasoning part is too unsophisticated to grasp the complete truth. Thus, the non-reasoning part of a philosopher's soul requires false beliefs in the same way that a non-philosopher does.[2]

7.1 Belief and Control

Recall from Chapter 3 that the noble lie achieves two goals: (1) it unifies the city by making citizens believe that they are all part of one family and (2) it separates the city on the basis of the principle of specialization. Both aspects of the lie function on two different levels: a mythical level and an ethical level:

Unifying Aspect

> *Mythical Level*: The native land is the mother of all citizens, making them biological siblings.
>
> (False)

> *Ethical Level*: The citizens should care for each other as one cares for a biological sibling.
>
> (True)

Separating Aspect

> *Mythical Level*: The citizens have metal in their souls corresponding to their natural abilities, which are suited towards certain tasks.
>
> (False)

> *Ethical Level*: The citizens should do the tasks assigned to their class and shouldn't interfere in the activities of the other classes.
>
> (True)

Thus, Socrates sees this lie as playing an essential role in the city and the ethical development of the citizens. Moreover, Socrates is clear that the lie is not merely intended for the non-philosophers, for he explicitly says, "I will first be trying to persuade the rulers and the soldiers, and then the rest of the city" (3.414d2–4; see also 414c1–2). Despite its importance and general applicability, Glaucon and Socrates express doubts about the lie's viability (415c–d). The worry is that this myth sounds archaic and is not the kind of thing that Socrates' contemporaries would believe (414b–c).

Such concerns lead Socrates to ask Glaucon if he has any device for making the citizens believe it (415c), to which Glaucon replies, "I can't see any way to make them believe it themselves, but perhaps there is one in the case of their sons and later generations and all the other people who come after them" (415d1–2). This raises the question: why would it be difficult to convey the myth directly to adults? Socrates doesn't give us an answer, but presumably it is because one cannot directly believe what one finds incredible.

7.1.1 Belief

That people cannot directly believe what they currently take to be false is a plausible thesis that most philosophers accept, but why would Plato accept it?[3] A passage that occurs just before Socrates discusses the noble lie provides a clue. In Book 3, Socrates begins to describe how rulers are distinguished from lesser guardians. He says that the rulers must care for the city (412c–d) and that they must see the good of the city as being good for them as individuals (412d–e). He then states that

> we will have to observe them at every stage of their lives to make sure that they are good guardians of this conviction, and that neither compulsion nor sorcery will cause them to discard or forget their belief that they must do what is best for the city.
>
> (412e4–7)

Glaucon asks Socrates to clarify what he means by "discard," to which he responds, "it seems to me that the departure of a belief from someone's mind is either voluntary or involuntary—voluntary when he learns that the belief is false; involuntary in the case of all true beliefs" (412e8–413a2). Glaucon understands the voluntary kind, but the involuntary confuses him. Socrates explains:

> SOC.: What? Don't you know that people are involuntarily deprived of good things, but voluntarily deprived of bad ones? And isn't being deceived about the truth a bad thing, whereas possessing the truth is a good one? Or don't you think that to believe the things that are [*ta onta*] is to possess the truth? (413a5–8)[4]
>
> GLAU.: No, you are right. And I do think that people are involuntarily deprived of true beliefs. (a9–10)
>
> SOC.: Then isn't it through theft, compulsion, and sorcery that this happens? (b1–2)
>
> GLAU.: Now I do not understand again. (b3)
>
> SOC.: I suppose I am making myself as clear as a tragic poet! By those who have their beliefs stolen from them, I mean those who are overpersuaded or those who forget; because argument, in the one

> case, and time in the other, takes away their beliefs without their noticing … Well then, by those who are compelled, I mean those who are made to change their beliefs by some suffering or pain … And the victims of sorcery, I think you would agree, are those who change their beliefs because they are charmed by pleasure or terrified by some fear.
>
> (413b4–c3)

Socrates uses this passage to justify subjecting the guardians to various tests so that they can maintain their convictions in the face of pleasures and pains. We will return to that idea shortly, but for now we need to examine what this passage is saying. One might take this passage as evidence in favor of the Alethic Interpretation since it seems to suggest that all true beliefs are good and all false beliefs are bad. However, as we will explain, the passage needn't imply this, nor does such an admission amount to anything as strong as the Absolutist Evaluative Claim—for some good things can be overridden by better things and some bad things can be endorsed for the sake of avoiding worse things. As we saw in Chapter 3, sometimes pursuing the false can be consistent with sincerely valuing truth and hating falsehood, and such a combination of actions and attitudes is unlike (ostensibly) valuing justice while committing murder for wealth and power. This is all to say, *if* this passage implies that all truth is valuable, it doesn't thereby necessitate the Alethic Interpretation.

That being said, the claim that all truth is valuable is not the main idea of the passage. Socrates' aim in the passage is to make three related points. The first and most important point concerns the education and abilities of those who will become rulers. It is paramount that the rulers see the good of the city as inextricably linked with their own good, and that this conviction can withstand all sorts of pressure.

The second point concerns the constitutive nature of belief: belief aims at truth, and as such true beliefs are voluntary and false beliefs are involuntary.[5] Because this idea is complex, let's begin with something more familiar: Socratic desire.[6] Desire aims at the Good. This constrains what constitutes a voluntary desire and the guise under which we can desire something. Satisfying a harmful desire is involuntary in the sense that all desires aim at what is good and a harmful desire is only apparently good and hence not what we actually aim at qua desirer. We can and do desire bad things, but we can't desire bad things under the guise of the bad; we desire them under the guise of the good. We, for instance, can't desire something that we fully acknowledge is bad in all respects (i.e. under the guise of the bad).

With this in mind, let us consider belief. The constitutive aim of belief—truth—constrains what constitutes a voluntary belief and the guise under which we can believe something.[7] A false belief is involuntary in the sense that all beliefs aim at truth and false belief is only apparently true and

thus not what we actually aim at qua believer. We can and do have false beliefs, but we can't believe these propositions under the guise of falsehood, we believe them under the guise of the true. For instance, we can't directly believe something that appears in all respects false (i.e. under the guise of the false). True beliefs are thus good qua belief.

However, this doesn't mean that we always take the content of our beliefs to be good, nor does it mean that we all have a deep love of truth.[8] Rather, Socrates is making a point about the structure of belief itself. If Isabella believes that her beloved brother is dead, she doesn't view the content of this belief as something good. But insofar as this is how things appear to her, she takes this to be a good belief (and if her brother is dead, it is in fact a good belief in virtue of the belief being true). Now, it might even be better for Isabella's psychology to believe her brother is still alive, but given that this in no way appears to her to be the case, she cannot believe this. This isn't to say that Isabella couldn't *indirectly* condition herself to believe this—through hypnotism, motivated reasoning, head injury, etc.—rather, it is the claim that she cannot *directly* believe this as things appear to her now.[9] In such a case, we hold that the belief is epistemically irrational or bad, but it is practically rational or good, and thus we have an all-things-considered reason to cultivate it indirectly (see Sosa 2010, 34).

Socrates' third point is that, given that these educational beliefs are so important, the guardians must be trained in such a way that they don't lose them indirectly. We lose beliefs indirectly in three ways: through theft (argument and forgetfulness), through compulsion (suffering and pain), and through sorcery (fear and pleasure).[10] Thus, the education must be such that this conviction is able to withstand all of these things. The takeaway from this is that, if the guardians are going to believe the noble lie and maintain its core teachings, the noble lie and lessons must appear true to them. For this to happen, the noble lie and its lessons must be built into the early childhood education program so that it shapes the development of guardians and thus does not grate against already held commitments. Indeed, this is just what we find in the *Republic*.

7.1.2 Early Childhood Education

According to Socrates, early childhood education is critical because it is during this period that one's psychology is "most malleable" and can take on "any pattern one wishes to impress on it" (2.377a12–b3). It is essential to expose children to appropriate stories because this content will be impressed into their souls and greatly affect their ethical development. If children are exposed to stories that praise injustice or cowardice, they will likely become adults who praise injustice or cowardice (2.377d–378e and 3.386a–388e). The danger of hearing these stories is exacerbated by the fact that "the young can't distinguish what is allegorical from what isn't" (2.378d7–8). Thus, when children hear stories about gods and heroes, they

will not be able to distinguish between the allegorical lesson and the literal story. This is especially dangerous because "the opinions [children] absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable" (2.378d8–e1).

We now have a clear explanation for why Glaucon thinks that children stand a good chance of absorbing the noble lie, while adults do not. Children are malleable and not able to discern allegory from literal truth. Therefore, if children are taught the noble lie, they will fully believe the mythical aspects, which will in turn lead them to believe the ethical aspects. For instance, if a young guardian were taught that the real mother of each citizen is the native land, she would believe that all the citizens are her biological relatives, and this would aid in the cultivation of the true ethical commitment that she should love and care for her fellow citizens as relatives.

In contrast, it is unlikely that adults who weren't taught the noble lie (or a similar story) as children would believe the mythical aspect of it. This is because adults can decipher between allegory and reality, their psychological states are relatively fixed, and, as we explained above, one cannot directly believe what appears false. If an adult doesn't believe the mythical aspects of the noble lie, this will make them less likely to believe the ethical aspects (cf. Lear 2006, 32–33). For instance, an individual discovering the noble lie as an adult would be skeptical that she has a type of metal in her soul that identifies her with certain duties—especially if these duties conflict with her desires.

From this discussion, it is clear that Socrates anticipates that the guardian children will believe the mythical aspects of the noble lie, but do the adult philosophers continue believing the mythical aspects? Those who defend the Philosopher Claim usually maintain that when the guardians become philosopher-rulers, they believe only the true ethical commitment of the noble lie and no longer believe the mythical aspects.[11] That is, the philosophers believe that they should care for all citizens as their own family members and that different citizens are suited to different tasks, but they do not actually believe that all citizens are born from the same mother and that different citizens are born with different kinds of metal in their souls.

In the next section, we offer a preliminary argument against the Philosopher Claim. While this argument ultimately fails, it is still instructive for the development of a more sophisticated argument that we shall raise against the Philosopher Claim.

7.2 Dyed Wool and the Bent Stick

7.2.1 Preliminary Argument

Two ideas seem to tell against the Philosopher Claim. First, as we previously mentioned, Socrates explicitly says that the beliefs children absorb "are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable" (2.378d8–e1; see also

3.401d–e and 4.425a). This, of course, doesn't mean that Socrates believes that adults necessarily retain all of their childhood beliefs, yet it does demonstrate that he thinks that beliefs acquired as a child are difficult to remove. Second, Socrates makes it clear that many of the beliefs that the guardians adopt during their education are "dyed" so deeply into their souls that they are preserved "through everything" (4.429b9, 4.429c8, and 4.430b3). He explains that just as "no amount of washing, whether with soap or without it" can remove the dye from wool that has been properly dyed (4.429e1–3), no amount of "pleasure, pain, fear, and desire" (4.429c9–d1 and 4.430b1–2) can remove the beliefs about what to fear and what not to fear from the properly educated guardians (4.429e–430b).

It is clear from Socrates' discussion of the noble lie that if there are beliefs that he wants etched into the souls of the guardians, the noble lie is surely one of them. After all, he describes the best-case scenario as one in which philosophers are persuaded of the noble lie (3.414c1–2), and he explicitly says that he wants to persuade the rulers first (414d2–4).[12] Additionally, just before Socrates introduces the noble lie in Book 3, he asserts that the best guardians will be able to maintain their conviction that "they must always do what they believe to be best for the city" (413c5–7) in the face of "labors, pains, and contests" (413d4–5). Consider also that Socrates says:

> Like those who lead colts into noise and tumult to see if they're afraid, we must expose our young people to fears and pleasures, testing them more thoroughly than gold is tested by fire. If someone is hard to put under a spell … is a good guardian of himself and the music and poetry he has learned … then he is the best person both for himself and for the city. Anyone who is tested in this way as a child, youth, and adult, and always comes out of it untainted, is to be made a ruler as well as a guardian.
>
> (413d7–414a2)

Hence, the philosopher-rulers will be those who maintain their convictions that they should care for the city in the face of everything, which is exactly what Socrates takes the noble lie to be teaching the citizens (415d). This suggests that the noble lie will remain with the citizens even if they become philosopher-rulers.

Nevertheless, this argument against the Philosopher Claim ultimately fails. The problem is that these passages only support the weaker claim that philosopher-rulers maintain the ethical convictions taught by the noble lie; thus, these passages do not entail that philosophers believe the mythical aspects of the lie. Hence, consistent with this passage is a philosopher-ruler who disavows that all the citizens are biological siblings, but who still believes that she should care for the city and all of its members

as her own family. Although this argument fails, it is still instructive. In order to see how, we must turn to Socrates' account of moral psychology in Books 4 and 10.

7.2.2 The Limits of the Non-Reasoning Part of the Soul

In Book 4, Socrates divides the soul into three parts: the appetitive part, the spirited part, and the reasoning or calculating part (*logistikon*). Unlike the reasoning part of the soul, the appetitive part and the spirited part are non-reasoning. Nonetheless, Socrates describes the non-reasoning parts of the soul as having some cognitive structure such that they have beliefs and desires. For instance, in Book 10, he directly says, "Then the part of the soul that believes [*doxazon*] contrary to the measurements couldn't be the same as the part that believes in accord with them" (603a1–2).[13]

Consider also the following passage from Book 4 in which Socrates says:

> And it is because of the spirited part, I suppose, that we call a single individual courageous, namely, when it preserves through pains and pleasures the declarations of reason about what is to be feared and what isn't [see also 429c–d] … And we'll call him wise because of that small part of himself that rules in him and makes those declarations and has within it the knowledge of what is advantageous for each part and for the whole soul, which is the community of all three parts … And isn't he moderate because of the friendly and harmonious relations between these same parts, namely, when the ruler and the ruled believe [*homodoxōsi*] in common that the reasoning part should rule and don't raise faction against it?
>
> (442b10–d2)[14]

Interpreting the lower parts of the soul as having some cognitive ability and independence is supported in Book 9. Socrates likens the parts of the soul to three different creatures: the appetitive part is like a large many-headed beast, the spirited part is like a lion, and the reasoning part is like a little human (588c–e). These creatures somehow have grown together and from the outside appear as a human being. How these three beings relate to each other depends on one's overall psychological disposition. For instance, in the case of the person who praises injustice: (a) the many-headed beast and lion grow strong; (b) the beast and the lion starve, weaken, and drag the little human; and (c) all three parts fight amongst each other (588e–589a). In contrast, the person who praises justice secures that: (a) his words and actions give the little human in him the most control; (b) the little human controls the many-headed beast like a farmer, "feeding and training the gentle [*ta hēmera*] heads, but hindering the growth of the wild [*ta agria*] heads"; and (c) he makes "an ally of the lion's nature, and

caring for the community of all his parts, he will bring them up in such a way that they are friends with each other and himself" (589b1–6). If we take Socrates at his word, this demonstrates that the non-reasoning part of the soul is capable of belief or a weaker belief-like state.[15]

But should we take Socrates at his word? Some scholars argue that the lower parts lack cognitive structure, and that when Socrates says that the appetitive part has beliefs, he means that reason can "formulate beliefs in service of an appetite" (Gerson 2003, 110). In other words, rather than understanding the soul parts as agent-like structures with some beliefs and desires, we should understand them as being different conceptual features or aspects of human psychology.[16] These alternative readings are motivated by metaphysical and conceptual worries. For instance, if the individual parts of the soul are agent-like, then presumably they can experience their own internal conflict. This might imply further partitioning of the soul and a potential infinite regress. Moreover, if the non-reasoning parts are capable of cognition, in what sense are they non-reasoning? In addition, homunculi accounts of the mind lead to puzzles about the location of the self: if the mind is like three beings interacting in a room, how is this a single self? Can a partitioned soul be a unity?[17]

This is certainly an interesting and complex issue, but it doesn't seem to matter all that much for our purposes. Aristotle is correct when he says:

> It is for the political expert too, then, to reflect about the soul, but he should do so for the sake of the things in question, and to the extent that will suffice in relation to what is being looked for; to go into greater detail is perhaps a task too laborious for our present enterprise … It makes no difference for present purposes whether these are delimited like the parts of the body, and like everything that is divisible into parts, or whether they are two things by definition but by nature inseparable, like the convex and the concave in the case of a curved surface.
>
> (*Eth. Nic.* 1.13.1102a23–32; see also *Eth. Eud.* 2.1.1219b32–6 and 1219b28; 1219b36–7)

When we are trying to determine educational and social policies, we need to know some things about human psychology—what motivates people, how humans reason, what are common sources of error—but we needn't be precise about the cognitive architecture and the mereology of the mind. Today, most psychologists accept some version of the dual-process theory (see Frankish 2010 and Kahneman 2011). This theory accounts for psychology in terms of two different kinds of processes: one more automated, immediate, and unconscious; the other more controlled, reflective, and conscious. Though the general idea of these two processes is well established, what exactly they amount to is of great debate (see Bellini-Leite 2018). For instance, is the two-process

model simply a metaphor? Does it involve two systems with two different evolutionary histories? Or are there actually two distinct minds?

Whatever the case may be, one can extract important ethical and educational lessons from the dual-process theory without answering these questions about cognitive architecture. For instance, pre-20th-century mainstream accounts of the mind relied on introspection, which resulted in a perspective of psychology that was reflective (see Frankish 2010). Today, this view is widely rejected because it neglects unconscious influences and automated reasoning. Now, if the unconscious and automated greatly affect our behavior, then we need to implement policies that reduce harmful errors stemming from them—and this is true even if the talk of a reflective self and an unreflective self is mere metaphor. With this in mind, we will keep talking about the non-reasoning parts of the soul as having beliefs and interacting with each other as agent-like beings because this is a useful way to understand what is going on in the mind or soul when thinking about social and educational policies (see Kamtekar 2006).

Although Socrates is willing to talk about the non-reasoning part of the soul as having the capacity for belief, its cognitive capacity is clearly inferior to the reasoning part. In Book 10, he explains that the non-reasoning part forms beliefs only on the basis of appearance, whereas the reasoning part can form beliefs on the basis of rational calculation via measuring, counting, and weighing (602d). He illustrates this with two examples. First, consider a stick partially submerged in water. When you perceive the stick, the non-reasoning part of you believes that the stick is bent (602c–d). However, the reasoning part of you is not limited to believing on the basis of appearance: through calculating, measuring, counting, and weighing, the reasoning part of you can form the belief that the stick is actually straight (602e–603a). Therefore, a person is not necessarily of one mind about the stick to the extent that the reasoning part can form the belief that the stick is straight while the non-reasoning part simultaneously believes that it is bent.

Now, just as a person is not necessarily of one mind in some instances of visual perception, a person is also not necessarily of one mind in matters of action (603c–d). According to Socrates, when a good and decent father loses a son, the reasoning part of him will deliberate about what future plans he needs to implement in order to continue living in the best way possible. Nevertheless, the non-reasoning part of the father will experience pain and suffering at the loss of his dear son because this is how the loss unreflectively appears to him (603e–604d; see also Austin 2016). The point is that just as the non-reasoning part inside of you takes the submerged stick to be bent, the non-reasoning part inside of you takes the loss of a son to be disastrous and the worst thing ever to happen. Likewise, just as the reasoning part of you can judge that the partially submerged stick isn't actually bent, the reasoning part of you can judge

that the loss of your son isn't the end of the world. Hence, the reasoning part has a capacity that the non-reasoning part lacks—it can form judgments on the basis of deliberative calculation, while the non-reasoning part is restricted to the realm of appearance.[18]

We are now in a position to explain why philosopher-rulers believe the mythical aspects of the noble lie in the non-reasoning parts of their souls. As we discussed above, the young guardians are taught the noble lie in such a way that the relevant beliefs are preserved "through everything"; presumably, one of the central images that the noble lie stains into the guardian's soul is that each citizen is her biological brother or sister. This belief will make the citizens appear differently—they will not appear as distant strangers, but as close relatives. When a philosopher-ruler completes her education, the reasoning part of her soul might (or might not) come to understand that the mythical aspects of the noble lie are mere stories and exaggerations, and thus that her fellow citizens are not really her biological brothers and sisters. Nevertheless, the non-reasoning part of her will hold fast to the false belief that her fellow citizens are her biological relatives. This is because they will appear as siblings to her non-reasoning part, which is limited to the realm of appearance.

Though false, this belief is beneficial: it produces unity and harmony in the city by motivating the philosophers to love the non-philosophers (see 5.462a–b). In order to see this, let us contrast two different reasons that a philosopher-ruler might have for believing that she should care for her fellow citizens:

R1. By caring for her fellow citizens, she is caring for her close biological relatives. (False)
R2. By caring for her fellow citizens, she is instantiating goodness, harmony, and oneness. (True)

As discussed earlier, the unifying aspect of the noble lie provides citizens with R1, which appeals to the natural bond and obligations that come with special relationships. In contrast, R2 appeals to the abstract ideas of goodness, harmony, and oneness, and how these concepts relate to caring for one's fellow citizens. This kind of understanding is only available to philosopher-rulers because only they come to know the Form of the Good.[19]

Taking this into account, the nobleness of the mythical aspects of the noble lie will become apparent, especially if one considers the counterfactual situation in which young guardians were not taught the noble lie but were instead presented with the truth. Imagine that they were taught that different individuals have different abilities and that there is no close ancestral bond between all citizens. These truths are likely to cause great disharmony amongst the citizens insofar as they wouldn't appear to one another as biological relatives with unique abilities. Thus,

the non-reasoning part of the soul wouldn't develop beliefs such as R1. This problem is worsened by the fact that the non-reasoning part of the soul lacks the capacity to grasp truths such as R2 because understanding these truths involves deliberative calculation.

If this is right, then we have a clear explanation for why Socrates considers it so important to persuade the philosopher-rulers of the noble lie. The non-reasoning part of the soul is too cognitively limited to respond positively to certain kinds of reasons such as R2. Thus, in order to motivate the non-reasoning part of the soul towards virtuous activity, it must be given cruder types of reasons such as R1. Therefore, without the mythical aspects of the noble lie, the non-reasoning part of philosophers' souls wouldn't be motivated towards virtuous activity, and as a result their souls would lack harmony and the city would suffer.

This may explain why Socrates believes that it is so dangerous for the young to train in dialectic. If young guardians are trained in dialectic before the non-reasoning part of their soul develops stable dispositions with respect to their fellow citizens, they might reject the noble lie and thus fail to develop the appropriate beliefs, desires, and motivational states. Socrates gestures at this in Book 7 when he asks Glaucon to imagine a young boy who, unbeknownst to him, is not being raised by his biological parents. The boy is surrounded by all sorts of flatterers and wealth, yet he gives no thought to these things and instead honors, obeys, and cares for his mother and father. However, if the boy were to discover that the people raising him were not his true biological parents, he would reject the values that they have been teaching him and would honor, obey, and care for the flatterers instead (537e–538e).

The lesson is that one shouldn't train in dialectic until certain beliefs and dispositions are stable and thus won't be jeopardized under scrutiny of argumentation. Now although Socrates doesn't explicitly connect the story about the boy to the noble lie, the connection seems clear enough. If a boy were to discover that the people raising him were not, in fact, his parents, he would no longer care for them and the values that they instilled in him. Likewise, if a child were to discover that the mythical aspects of the noble lie were false, he would no longer care for his fellow citizens because he would no longer view them as his family.

These considerations point to a gap in the lives of philosophers that philosophical training cannot fill: there are certain natural desires and appetites that require proper guidance during one's youth, and the truth doesn't always properly shape these desires. Philosophers are deprived of their biological families (3.412–4.421c and 5.457b–471c), and in virtue of this they are deprived of basic and natural human relationships (cf. Okin 1977). The mythical aspects of the noble lie bridge this gap by making the non-reasoning part of their souls believe that the entire city is their biological family.[20] This fundamentally alters the way things unreflectively appear to them for the better.

7.3 Objections

7.3.1 Too Strong

We have just put forth a positive account of why the noble lie motivates virtuous activity in adult philosophers. One might worry that our thesis is too strong since it appears to preclude the possibility that someone like Socrates is virtuous. For instance, we have argued that the non-reasoning part of the soul cannot distinguish truth from falsity. As a result of this, the core beliefs one has as a child will remain in the non-reasoning part of the soul in adulthood. Hence, humans (such as Socrates) not raised in an appropriate environment will not have the appropriate core beliefs (such as the noble lie) in the non-reasoning part of the soul as adults, and thus their soul will lack harmony. This is problematic because Socrates is clearly as virtuous as any human could possibly be.

This objection loses its force, however, once we consider that Plato himself was aware of this concern. In Book 6, Socrates and Adeimantus discuss how to raise individuals to become real philosophers. Broadly speaking, this requires individuals having two things: (1) the appropriate philosophical nature and (2) the appropriate environment to nurture this nature. Hence, this account appears to suggest that if one has a philosophical nature, but lacks the appropriate environment, one will not develop into a philosopher. However, at 496a–d, Socrates acknowledges that it is still possible to become a philosopher even if one is raised in a corrupt city.

He provides five examples of this. First, some of those who have the proper philosophical nature might avoid being overtaken by corrupters through exile (496b). Second, a great-souled individual might look beyond the affairs of the small city where she resides (496b). Third, "a very few might be drawn to philosophy from other crafts that they rightly despise because of their good natures" (496b5–6). Fourth, others might avoid a corruptive environment as a result of a physical limitation; for instance, Theages' physical illness prevented him from pursuing politics, which would have tempted him away from philosophy (496b–c). Fifth, some individuals, such as Socrates, have divine signs that can guide them towards philosophy and away from corruption (496c). Speaking about these individuals, Adeimantus and Socrates say:

> ADEI.: Well, that's no small thing for him [i.e. a philosopher surrounded by corruption] to have accomplished before departing.
> SOC.: But it isn't the greatest either, since he didn't chance upon a constitution that suits him. Under a suitable one, his growth will be fuller, and he'll save the community as well as himself. (497a1–5)

The objection was raised that our interpretation is inconsistent with individuals like Socrates becoming philosophers: the objection is that because

individuals like Socrates lacked the appropriate core beliefs as children, they will not be able to develop the appropriate philosophical dispositions. This passage demonstrates that Socrates thinks it is still possible for individuals who were not raised in the right environment to become philosophers. Nevertheless, these individuals are rare, and their philosophical abilities will not be as great or reliable as they would have been if they were raised in the appropriate environment. Our response to this objection follows suit: individuals raised without the noble lie (or suitably similar educative falsehoods) can become philosophers, but they are anomalies. Moreover, these philosophers will not be as great or reliable as they would have been if they were raised with the appropriate core beliefs.

A related objection is that our view doesn't afford enough control to the reasoning part of the soul. For instance, we hold that virtuous motivation requires certain false beliefs in the non-reasoning part of the soul. One might take this to suggest that beliefs in the non-reasoning part cannot be modified by the reasoning part. This is troubling because, presumably, Plato believes that reason can alter one's appetites and spirit. Suppose that a person comes to appreciate healthy foods only after studying nutrition as an adult. It would seem that her understanding of nutrition altered her desire for healthy food. One might object that our view doesn't allow for this possibility.

We have three replies. First, given the vast amount of psychological evidence demonstrating that our thoughts, emotions, and behavior are far more influenced by automation than we realize, we are not troubled by this objection (see Doris 2002 and 2015). The fact that our reading makes deliberation play a less significant role means that we see Plato's view as being in greater alignment with contemporary empirical psychology. Second, as we explained in Chapters 1 and 2, Plato believes that early childhood education is mostly a matter of cultivating appropriate basic ethical judgments and affective responses. As people develop intellectually, they build upon the dispositions that they cultivated as children. Hence, without a proper childhood education, it is very difficult to become fully virtuous because one will be disposed to like and dislike the wrong things. In fact, it is often the case that those individuals with the best souls by nature become awful with an improper education (see 6.491d–e and 7.518e–519a). Third, as we stated earlier, although it is difficult and rare, Plato does accept the possibility that one could become virtuous without a proper early childhood education.

With this in mind, let's return to the situation in which an adult comes to appreciate healthy food after studying nutrition. Does this new information shift her appetite for healthy food? Plato's answer seems to be that this new information can transform the appetitive part of the soul to some extent, but it is unlikely that it will fully alter it, and thus the soul will always be less harmonious than it would have been if one

received the appropriate early childhood education. Hence, on Plato's view, such a person will still experience conflicts in which her appetitive part desires junk food and her reasoning part desires healthy food (although with more training and study, these conflicts will occur with less intensity and frequency).

A contemporary analogue would be to think about the ways that one's cultural background affects implicit bias. While engaging in reflection and following stringent societal policies, one can avoid making biased decisions (cf. Doris 2015). But overcoming bias through reflection and policy doesn't mean that one has eradicated bias from one's psychology, and thus it doesn't mean that one is entirely safeguarded from acting biasedly. Because we can neither incessantly deliberate nor always adhere to stringent policies—sometimes the situation requires split-second decisions—whether implicit bias exists and affects one's behavior is of the utmost importance. So, even if a philosopher can control her behavior through reason, her unreflective attitudes/beliefs/emotions are still relevant because she cannot always reflect.

7.3.2 Too Weak

Another objection to our account is that it is too weak to support our thesis because we have not shown that the virtuous soul always requires false beliefs. For instance, one might argue that we have shown only that false beliefs are useful for developing virtue, whereas in fact they become superfluous once one becomes virtuous. Perhaps a virtuous person's non-reasoning part simply accepts that it should follow the command of the reasoning part (see 4.442b–d). Accordingly, the false beliefs might guide the non-reasoning part to make this decision and to develop the appropriate habits, but once one develops the appropriate dispositions, these false beliefs are no longer useful.

We have two responses to this objection. First, even when one develops the appropriate dispositions, the educative false beliefs are still counterfactually important. In Book 9, Socrates explains that unnecessary and unlawful appetites are "probably present in everyone, but they are held in check by the laws and by the better appetites in alliance with reason. In a few people, they have been eliminated entirely or only a few weak ones remain, while in others they are stronger and more numerous" (571b3–c1). This passage suggests two ways that inappropriate appetites can be controlled: (1) they can be restrained by the law and reason, and (2) they can be altogether eliminated, or at the very least, severely reduced.

Notice that the latter case provides a kind of counterfactual reliability insofar as if the law or reason were temporarily absent, one would still pursue virtue because one doesn't have vicious thoughts, or has them only to a small degree. However, this doesn't hold true in the former case;

in such a case, when the law and reason are absent, these vicious desires will run rampant. Socrates explains:

> [I am speaking of] those desires that are awakened in sleep, when the rest of the soul—the rational, gentle, and ruling part—slumbers. Then the beastly and savage part, full of food and drink, casts off sleep and seeks to find a way to gratify itself. You know that there is nothing it won't dare to do at such a time, free of all control by shame or reason.
>
> (571c3–d1)

The noble lie promotes virtuous desires and reduces vicious desires by inspiring citizens to love each other and to care about the common good of the city. This in turn provides a kind of counterfactual reliability, such that if reason weren't in control or if there weren't laws compelling obedience, one would still be motivated to love one's fellow citizens and to care for the good of the whole city.[21]

Second, as we explained earlier, the division between the reasoning and non-reasoning part of the soul is between appearance and reflection. The stick in the water doesn't stop appearing bent, even when we reflect on it. This also holds true for evaluative judgments. This is one of the reasons why Socrates is deeply concerned about poetry: it shapes the appearance of things. Thus, even for a fully developed philosopher, things will still unreflectively appear a certain way, and it is important that what is good unreflectively appears fine and what is bad unreflectively appears shameful, as far as possible.

The point above returns us to the contemporary analogue about implicit bias. One can *overcome* implicit bias through reflection and stringent practices, but there are still dangers to having implicit bias since one cannot always reflect or adhere to these practices. Thus, it is important that a society develops the appropriate cultural background beliefs so that our unreflective attitudes/emotions/beliefs are shaped in a positive way.

7.3.3 Inconsistent

Some scholars might object that our interpretation results in the philosopher's soul being too divided. They might argue that because our reading implies that different parts of the soul hold different beliefs (or are in different cognitive states), the soul isn't properly unified, and this is problematic because philosophers are supposed to exist in a state of psychic harmony. However, our interpretation avoids this problem, and it does so in a way that illuminates something that many scholars have underappreciated: psychic harmony is not a matter of the different parts of the soul holding the exact same beliefs or being in the identical state—for this is impossible. Psychic harmony, rather, is a matter of the different

parts of the soul sharing certain beliefs about who should rule and what one should pursue.

The personification of the soul discussed in Book 9 is helpful for understanding this point. As we discussed above, Socrates asks us to imagine that the soul comprises three agent-like beings. Given that these beings have different motivations and cognitive capacities, they cannot be in the exact same states, and thus we shouldn't think of psychological harmony along these lines. This would be akin to thinking that domestic harmony occurs when the parents, children, and dog experience the same mental state. Hence, we must posit an alternative account of harmony. The account of *sōphrosunē* (temperance/moderation) in Book 4 provides an alternative: *sōphrosunē* in the city and soul is a harmony that occurs when there is an agreement between the parts that the rational part should rule (430e–432a and 442c–d). Just as domestic harmony can't occur if the dog or children rule the house, psychological harmony can't occur if the appetitive part or the spirited part rule the soul. If we remove the language of personification, this amounts to one's beliefs and affective states, both reflective and unreflective, aiming at what is best overall.

7.4 Summary

This chapter rebuts the Philosopher Claim: we argued that Plato thinks that the non-reasoning part of a philosopher benefits from believing the mythical aspect of the noble lie. Early childhood education shapes how things unreflectively appear to us as adults; it is the foundation of our desires, motives, and values. The noble lie motivates citizens to care for each other more and to fulfill their civic duties willingly. It is certainly true that philosophers are capable of understanding these lessons in greater depth through rational reflection. Nonetheless, their immediate and unreflective attitude towards these things is shaped by the stories they were told when young. Just as the partially submerged stick always looks bent, one's fellow citizen always resembles a sibling and one's civic duty always appears to be one's destiny.

Having seen evidence that philosophers can be justified in taking epistemic risks (Chapters 4 and 5), and even benefit from false beliefs (this chapter), we next examine whether the same is true of the gods. We will argue that this issue marks a dividing line between humanity and divinity: though even the most divine humans can benefit from falsehood, the divine itself cannot.

Notes

1 D. Williams (2013, 313n51) says: "A trickier question is why Socrates suggests that the myth should also be told to the rulers (*Resp*. 414b, 414d). To be sure, he is unclear whether or not they can be similarly misled … It is possible—and maybe even likely—that Plato simply thinks that the myth is

likely to take hold among the masses if the rulers also believe it. There would be no 'leaks' of the truth and less possibility of it ever being revealed as fiction. But again, the effectiveness of the myth does not seem logically contingent upon persuading the rulers, and Plato is dubious about the likelihood of their believing it." For a different take on this issue, see Rowett (2016).

2 For the sake of simplicity, we will limit ourselves to discussing the noble lie and the moral psychology of the *Republic*. It should be clear how the account we provide in this chapter applies to the other falsehoods in the *Republic*, and we leave it to the reader's imagination how it might apply in other dialogues.

3 This concerns two paradoxes of self-deception. How can one simultaneously believe two contradictory claims (the "static paradox"), and how can one get oneself to believe what is false (the "dynamic paradox"). Those who wish to preserve a traditional notion of self-deception resort to temporal or psychological partitioning of belief to try to overcome these paradoxes (Deweese-Boyd 2017).

4 Smith (2019, Chap. 2) uses the reference to *ta onta* as a vindication of the Forms reading discussed in Chapter 1.

5 The idea that belief aims at truth became a point of discussion in the analytic tradition after B. Williams' (1973, Chap. 9) discussion of this issue. This claim can be understood as either a conceptual claim (beliefs represent what we take to be true) or a normative claim (belief ought to aim at truth) (see McCormick 2015, Chaps. 1–2).

6 We will handle this complex issue in a rather breezy manner; we bring it up merely to illustrate what we mean by "belief aims at truth." For a plausible recent discussion of Plato's account of desiring the good, see Kamtekar (2017). For an overview with respect to Plato, see Barney (2010); *Prt*. 358b–d; *Meno* 77a–78c; *Grg*. 466a–468e; and *Symp*. 205d–206a. For a general overview of the philosophical issue, see Tenenbaum (2013).

7 *Cratylus* 420b–c is helpful here. Socrates explains that belief (*doxa*), thinking (*oiēsis*), wishing (*boulesthai*), and deliberating (*bouleuesthai*) all have to do with aiming at a target or reaching an end. Belief and thinking aim at how things are; that is, they aim at the truth. Similarly, in the *Theaetetus* (194a) falsehood is likened to an archer missing a target. Thanks to J. Clerk Shaw for alerting us to these passages.

8 Speaking about epistemic norms, Feldman writes, "All people epistemically ought to follow their evidence, not just those who have adopted some specifically epistemic goals" (2000, 682).

9 On the aim of belief as constitutively aiming at truth, see Shah (2003) and Wedgwood (2002). On our reading, one cannot believe *X* if there is overwhelming counter-evidence against *X*, but if the evidence is roughly counterbalanced one can believe *X*.

10 It isn't clear how guardians at an early age will train in rhetoric and argument in light of Socrates' restriction of these activities to old age. Perhaps one trains in them indirectly at a young age by cultivating a sound character.

11 Here is a sampling of scholars who appear to defend the Philosopher Claim: Adam (1902, *ad loc*. 415d) remarks that "the Rulers of VI-VII might teach the legend as an ἐν δέοντι ψεῦδος [a necessary falsehood], but would themselves refuse their assent." Annas (1981, 108, emphasis added) offers a similar account: "Plato seems to envisage the Guardians as eventually believing it [i.e. the noble lie], so we do not have a straight case of manipulation by them of the others; *but the rulers are surely thought of as believing the myth on a rather different level from the others*. So there is, at the least, a double standard." Lear (2006, 33) argues that the "noble falsehood" (Lear's phrase) has

"a special belated effect on the future rulers of the city … [It] sets them up for a later aha!-experience" in which they discover the truth about the noble lie. Lear (2006, 34) likens this to "getting a joke many years after you've heard the punch line." Reeve (2004, xxii) writes: "So, the fact that the ideologies of the guardians and producers are falsely sustained while the philosopher-kings are ideology-free seems to be a strength in Kallipolis, rather than a weakness." See also Crossman (1959, 91–92) and Fite (1934, 29).

12 Strictly speaking, in Book 3 Socrates doesn't say that the best-case scenario is one in which philosopher-rulers are persuaded of the noble lie. He says only that the best-case scenario is one in which the rulers are persuaded of the noble lie, and it is not until Book 5 that he reveals that philosophers will rule. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the rulers discussed in Book 3 are the same as the rulers discussed in Book 5. At the very least, we can assume that the philosopher-rulers discussed in Book 5 will emerge from the guardian class and thus will be raised to believe the noble lie during their youth.

13 It is a matter of dispute whether the non-reasoning part of the soul discussed in Book 10 is the appetitive part, the spirited part, both, or neither (see Murphy 1951, 239–240; Nehamas 1999, Chap. 12; Lorenz 2006, Moss 2008; Ganson 2009; Schultz 2019; and Singpurwalla 2010, 2011). However, the answer to this question is irrelevant for our purposes; all that matters is that Socrates thinks that the soul has a non-reasoning part possessing these features.

14 See also 9.574d–575a and 10.605c. In the *Phaedo*, Plato attributes to the body the cognitive capacities he assigns to the lower parts of the soul; see 65b–d, 80a, 83d, and 94c–e; cf. *Phlb*. 32b–36c. In the *Phaedrus*, the soul is depicted with a chariot metaphor in which the parts of the soul are agential and possess some cognitive capacities; see 253d–254d and 256a. In the *Timaeus*, the lower parts of the soul have cognitive capacities (69d–71a), but the appetitive part is no longer capable of belief (77b). Lorenz (2006, Chap. 7; see also 2012) argues that this is a result of Plato raising the standards for what counts as belief. In the *Philebus*, Socrates describes the soul as having a writer and a painter; see 38e–40c. Lorenz (2006, Chap. 7) holds that the *logoi* belongs to the reasoning part of the soul, while the images belong to the non-reasoning part (see also Moss 2012, 262–69).

15 See Moline (1978); Penner (1971, 100); Irwin (1995, 216–222); Bobonich (2002, Chap. 3); Lorenz (2006, Part 1); Moss (2008); Fortenbaugh (1975, 38–44); Lesses (1987, 149–154); Kahn (1987, 85); Gill (1996, 245–260); Annas (1981, Chap. 5; 1999, 133–136); and Scott (2000, 30–32).

16 For readings that are more conceptual and less homunculi-based, see Anagnostopoulos (2006); Price (2009); Shields (2001, 2010); and Woods (1987). Wilberding (2012) argues that the "beliefs" of the appetitive part are similar to the mental states of normative judgments according to non-cognitivist metaethical views. Jennifer Whiting (2012) offers a hybrid reading of the text.

17 This appears to be the problem Karl Pilkington struggled with on the *Ricky Gervais Show* when he asks, "Does the brain control you or are you controlling the brain? I don't know if I'm in charge of mine." After Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant inform him that he is his brain or mind, Karl appears to hypothesize that his brain has its own brain, and that brain has its own brain. Mr. Pilkington remarkably seems to capture both the "regress problem" and the "self problem." On the question of what it means for the non-reasoning part to be "non-reasoning," see Lorenz (2006); on the question of how a partitioned soul can be a unity, see Brown (2012).

18 Contemporary accounts of folk psychology often differentiate between a more reflective belief and a more immediate belief (see Dennett 1978, 300–309; L. Cohen 1992; Frankish 2004). The beliefs and belief formation process of the non-reasoning part of the soul has clear affinities with Gendler's (2008a, 2008b) notion of "alief." Aliefs are belief-like states, but are unreflective, emotional, and normatively laden (cf. Muller and Bashour 2011). The account of the soul and poetry in Book 10 has affinities with debates in aesthetics and philosophy of mind. Scholars have long wondered if a person at the movies believes what they see on screen. Many scholars have rejected the claim that we actually believe what is on the screen because it conflicts with what we reflectively endorse. Qulity-Dunn (2015) cogently argues that this objection is misguided because the causal mechanism of perceptual beliefs can persist even when one has a central belief that contradicts the perceptual belief, and we can have beliefs that we do not reflectively endorse.

19 Although we are making an assumption about what knowledge of the Forms is like, this assumption is widely held (see Brown 2004, 287; Irwin 1995, 272–273; Fine 2003, Chaps. 3–4; and Annas 1999, 108).

20 In the allegory of the cave, Socrates asserts that once the philosophers leave the cave, they have to be persuaded and compelled to return to it (6.500d, 7.519e–521b, and 7.539e–540b). However, he doesn't explain the means by which the rulers will be persuaded. We suggest that this might take the form of reinforcing their disposition to view the entire city as their family.

21 The text is ambiguous as to whether embodied humans can totally eradicate their vicious desires: 9.571b–c is optimistic, but 9.589b raises some doubts.

8 Truthful Gods and the Limits of Divine Assimilation

> Since God is omnipotent he cannot die, he is not able to be deceived, nor can he lie; and as the Apostle says, "He cannot deny himself" … For if he could die, he would not be omnipotent; if he could lie, be deceived, deceive, or act in any unjust way, he would not be omnipotent, because if this were in him, he would not have been worthy to be omnipotent.
>
> (Augustine, *sym. cat.* 1.2, CCL 46, 185–186)

> By "God" I mean the very being the idea of whom is within me, that is, the possessor of all the perfections which I cannot grasp … who is subject to no defects whatsoever. It is clear enough from this that he cannot be a deceiver, since it is manifest by the natural light that fraud and deception depend on some defect.
>
> (Descartes, *Med.* AT 7.52/CSM 2.35)

We have seen in Part I how ordinary citizens can benefit from deception. In the previous chapter, we learned that philosophers too can benefit from falsehoods. This conclusion is further supported by the arguments of Chapters 4 and 5: in those chapters, we argued that Socrates—perhaps the most philosophical of all humans—was willing to risk falsehood for the sake of certain practical benefits. Since falsehood is useful for both fools and philosophers alike, one might wonder if it can also be useful for the gods. Can deception be utilized by the gods for their own advantage? And if not for their own benefit, might the gods have reason to lie for the sake of promoting justice and the good, just as philosopher-rulers do?

As illustrated by the epigraphs, a traditional theological perspective rejects the possibility of divine deception.[1] Augustine, Descartes, and many other philosophers and theologians maintain that God cannot lie because deception is immoral and thereby incompatible with divine attributes such as moral perfection. In the *Republic*, Plato agrees that the gods do not deceive, but his explanation is different.[2] As we have seen, Plato does not share the view that lying is always wrong; for instance, he maintains that it is appropriate to lie in order to prevent the ignorant or the insane from doing wrong (2.382c). Further, Plato's Kallipolis is founded on a noble lie in which the philosopher-rulers deceive the inferior citizens

in order to create and maintain a just society (3.414b–415d). Yet, according to Plato, the gods never lie because they have no reason to (2.382e).[3] This is puzzling for at least two reasons. First, Plato claims that humans ought to strive to emulate the gods (2.383c, 6.500c–d, 6.501b, and 613a).[4] If lying is something that the gods would never do, then Plato's endorsement of human lying appears to be in tension with the assimilation directive. Second, if lying is a legitimate and effective means of facilitating justice within both an individual and a society, then we might expect that the gods, who love justice and the good, would have similar reasons to utilize deception (see F. Ferrari 1998).

The rest of this chapter is devoted to investigating this puzzle, which we refer to as the "Platonic divine deception puzzle." After developing the puzzle in greater detail, we consider a number of solutions, weighing the advantages and disadvantages of each position. We then offer our preferred solution, which is based on Plato's conception of friend and enemy in the *Republic*. For humans, friends are those individuals who are beneficial and good, while enemies are those who are useless and bad. Because we are not self-sufficient, we must live in societies and interact with individuals who stand towards us as both friends and enemies. These relations sometimes necessitate beneficial lies. Since the gods are self-sufficient, they have no need for such relations and the lies that they necessitate. Further, although the gods love all that is just and therefore love just humans, this doesn't imply that they benefit from humans becoming just. Hence, just humans are not friends of the gods in the relevant sense of "friend," and the fact that certain lies can facilitate justice in humans is not a reason for the gods to tell them.

Resolving the divine deception puzzle will allow us to complete the primary task of Part III, which is to determine exactly who can benefit from deception and how this is possible. We will also get a clearer picture of Plato's overall view on the disvalue of falsehood and the circumstances under which the badness of lies and ignorance can be overridden by ethical considerations.

8.1 The Platonic Divine Deception Puzzle

Plato's discussion of divine deception occurs in our key passage from Book 2, where Socrates distinguishes between genuine falsehoods and falsehoods in words. In this passage, Socrates mentions three ways in which a falsehood in words can be a useful device for humans (382c–d): (U1) for giving an account of historical events that you are ignorant of so long as the lie is made like the truth as much as possible; (U2) for deceiving enemies who intend to harm you; and (U3) for preventing your so-called friends from doing something bad out of ignorance or insanity.

Although a falsehood in words can be useful for humans, it is never useful for a god. Socrates and Adeimantus explain why U1–U3 never

apply to gods. Socrates asks, for instance, "Would he [a god] lie by making likeness of the truth about ancient events because of his ignorance of them?" (382d7). Adeimantus responds, "it would be ridiculous to think that" (382d8). Next, Socrates asks whether a god "would lie through fear of his enemies" (382d11), to which Adeimantus replies, "far from it" (382e1). Finally, Socrates asks whether a god would lie "because of the ignorance [*anoian*] or insanity [*manian*] of his family or friends [*oikeiōn*]" (382e2). Adeimantus rejects this possibility because "no one who is foolish or insane is a friend of the gods [*theophilēs*]" (382e3). This leads Socrates to conclude:

> Therefore, the daimonic and the divine are in every way free from falsehood … A god, then, is altogether simple, true in both word and deed. He doesn't change himself or deceive others by images, words, or signs, whether in visions or in dreams.
>
> (382e6–11; see also 383a; *Euthphr*. 6a–c)

Although Socrates and Adeimantus do not explicitly state why U1 and U2 do not apply to gods, the answers are rather obvious. U1 is a ridiculous reason for gods to lie because they are not ignorant of ancient events. U2 is ruled out because the gods cannot be harmed and thus have nothing to fear (381a–c). Simply put, the gods are too knowledgeable and powerful to benefit along the lines of U1 and U2.

While Plato's reasons against U1 and U2 applying to the gods are plausible, his rejection of U3 is strange, at least to a modern reader. For we typically conceive of God as a sort of friend to us—at least insofar as God is a benefactor. So we might expect the gods to have reasons to lie to us when we are on the verge of behaving badly due to ignorance or insanity. This is not the kind of answer that we get, however. We are told, rather, that the gods do not lie to the ignorant or insane because they are not friends with them.

This is all the more puzzling when we consider two things. First, recall that at 3.389b, Plato tells us that philosophers' epistemic and moral superiority permits them to lie to non-philosophers. Also, recall that from this passage we derived the following principle:

> Justified Lying Principle: Individual *A* can justifiably lie to individual *B* if *A* occupies a superior epistemic and moral vantage point in relation to *B*, and *A* has strong reasons to believe that the lie will benefit *B*.

With the justified lying principle, we would expect that the gods would occasionally have reasons to lie. Indeed, in response to Descartes' claim that God does not deceive, Marin Mersenne follows a similar line of reasoning when he says, "[H]ow do you conclude that we cannot be deceived

by him [God]? Cannot God treat men as a doctor treats the sick, or a father his children? In both these cases there is frequent deception though it is always employed beneficially and with wisdom" (AT 7.126/CSM 2.90).[5]

Second, after Socrates asserts that the falsehood in words can be useful for humans and is never useful for gods, he says that humans should aspire to be as god-like as possible:

> Whenever anyone says such things about a god [i.e. that a god deceives], we'll be angry with him, refuse him a chorus, and not allow his poetry to be used in the education of the young, so that our guardians will be as god-fearing and godlike as human beings can be. (383c1–5)

Thus, Plato is committed to the following three claims:

1. Humans ought to lie on certain occasions.
2. The gods never have reasons to lie.
3. Humans should be as god-like as possible.

Of course, the qualification in (3) prevents these three commitments from contradicting each other (see Van Riel 2013, 22–23; cf. Bordt 2006, 184n70). Nonetheless, it is strange that Plato would introduce a lie that humans ought to tell but gods never would and then say that humans should be as god-like as possible.[6] Moreover, it would seem that the gods' love of justice would give them reason to facilitate it by telling beneficial lies. We will now explore some possible explanations for these perplexing features of Plato's discussion of divine deception.

8.2 Candidate Solutions

An initially tempting strategy involves attributing to Plato the traditional theological position that lying is categorically immoral, and that the gods are incapable of acting immorally. This line of argument is implicit in the work of Gregory Vlastos. For instance, in response to *Apology* 21b6–7, where Socrates says that it "wouldn't be right" (οὐ γὰρ θέμις αὐτῷ) for a god (Apollo) to lie, Vlastos (1999b, 72) writes:

> Why so? The gods in whom the city believes have no such scruples. They have been lying since Homer. Why should Socrates think his god would be so different? Because, as we saw earlier, unlike their gods, Socrates' god is invariantly good, incapable of causing any evil to anyone at any time. Since to deceive a man is to do evil to him, Socrates' god cannot be lying.

On a version of the Vlastosian reading, lying is intrinsically evil but overall justified when it promotes goodness in the cosmos (e.g. by helping

someone else become just, maintaining justice in the city). Here the explanation for the gods not having reason to lie would be that their divine nature prevents them from doing things that are inherently evil, even when the act would have overall good consequences. Although lying is intrinsically bad, humans (as beings without divine moral perfection) are capable of using deception and justified in doing so when this will promote goodness.[7]

While we believe the inherent badness of lying is part of the solution to the divine deception puzzle, it cannot be the whole story. Note that when he explains why the gods have no reason to lie, Socrates never makes an explicit appeal to the inherent evil of lying. If the gods' inability to do intrinsically bad things were the entire explanation, it would make more sense for Socrates to simply say so rather than giving the somewhat convoluted account involving U1, U2, and U3. As will become clear further below, a desideratum for an adequate solution to the puzzle is that it directly explains Socrates' rather obscure explanation, especially concerning U3.

A second strategy for resolving the divine deception puzzle involves holding that the gods do deceive, and that when Socrates claims otherwise, he is himself telling a lie. This is not a promising strategy. Note that when Socrates describes the gods he is both speaking about the educational program of the Kallipolis and speaking to Glaucon and Adeimantus directly. While Socrates endorses the use of deception in certain contexts, we have no reason to think that he would be dishonest when discussing important topics with his friends under normal circumstances. Aside from when he is clearly being ironic or speaking to sophists, it is reasonable to assume that Socrates is being truthful. And given the reasonableness of this assumption, Plato would be at serious risk of misleading his readers by having Socrates deceive his interlocutors without signaling that this is the case. The fact that this interpretation makes Socrates a liar and Plato a misleading writer is a significant strike against it. Hence, although this interpretation is able to overcome the divine deception puzzle swiftly, the problems it faces seem more damning than the puzzle itself.

8.3 Soul-Building

The divine deception puzzle shares similarities with two important topics within philosophy of religion: the problem of evil and the problem of divine hiddenness. The problem of evil is that of explaining how any of the seemingly pointless suffering on earth could be consistent with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect being. The problem of divine hiddenness arises from the lack of an explanation for why a being possessing the divine attributes would choose not to make his existence evident, given the numerous benefits that human knowledge of God would presumably bring (e.g. emotional consolation, deterrence

from harm, developing relationships with God). What these problems share in common with our present topic is the difficulty of explaining why a divine being would choose not to take certain actions that would presumably make the world a better place.[8]

One influential strategy for responding to the problems of evil and hiddenness makes an appeal to the value of moral virtue and the fact that adversity is necessary for its development. The general idea is that God is justified in allowing suffering or remaining hidden because this is the only way in which genuine moral growth could occur. The suffering we encounter in the world (perhaps including the harms arising through ignorance of God) is an unavoidable by-product of the conditions necessary for moral development, such as genuine freedom and the experience of conflict between duty and self-interest. Since human virtue is plausibly seen as one of God's primary purposes in creating the world, the purported necessities of suffering and hiddenness for morality constitute initially plausible solutions to these problems.

The overall success of soul-building theodicies and responses to divine hiddenness remains a highly contentious matter.[9] However, it is worth considering whether appealing to the necessary background conditions for human virtue might resolve the puzzle arising from Plato's claim that the gods have no reason to lie. We can begin by noting Plato's various assertions that the just and virtuous among human beings are friends to the gods.[10] There are a few different ways we might understand this claim, but one possibility is that the gods benefit from human beings becoming good. In order to see the ways in which human goodness might benefit the gods, let us examine C. C. W. Taylor's interpretation of the *Euthyphro*.

At 12e, Euthyphro suggests that piety is the part of justice that is concerned with the care (*therapeia*) of the gods. Eventually, this account is rejected because it suggests that the thing being cared for is less excellent than the thing caring for it (13c–d). For example, the dog depends on and needs the dog trainer in a certain way that the dog trainer doesn't depend on and need the dog. Additionally, the dog trainer's ability to teach and care for the dog displays that the trainer has epistemic abilities that the dog lacks. This clearly doesn't match the way in which humans can benefit the gods because it would mean that humans are in some sense superior to gods, just as the dog trainer is in some sense superior to the dog.

To avoid this, Euthyphro suggests that piety is really service (*hupēretikē*) to the gods in the way that a slave serves a master (13d). This leads to an inquiry into what product the gods achieve through their servants (13e). After some discussion, the question shifts to what the fine things are that the gods achieve (14a). Euthyphro answers that pious prayers and sacrifices preserve public and private affairs, while the opposite destroys them (14a–b). On Euthyphro's view, gods and humans are in a relationship of bartering and trading (14e–15b). This leads to a host of questions and

eventually Euthyphro contradicts himself (15b–e). Soon after this, the dialogue ends; hence, we are never explicitly told what good product humans could assist the gods in producing.

Taylor offers the following suggestion:

> Plainly the gods don't need human help in creating and maintaining the natural world, assuming those to be divine tasks. But there is one good product which they can't produce without human assistance, namely, good human souls. For a good human soul is a self-directed soul, one whose choices are informed by its knowledge of and love of the good. A good world must contain such souls and hence, if the beneficent divine purpose is to be achieved, human beings must play their part by knowing (and hence loving) the good and acting in accordance with that knowledge.
>
> (1982, 113; see also Vlastos 1999b, 74–75)

If Taylor is right about this, then we have a clear answer to the question of why the gods love us when we are good. The gods are interested in bringing about a good world, and in order to have a good world, they need us to be good humans.

Now, if the gods need us to be good for the completion of their divine project, this would make it even harder to understand why they wouldn't have reasons to tell us beneficial lies analogous to those that philosophers tell non-philosophers and that everyone tells to friends suffering from ignorance or insanity. However, Taylor's explanation for the gods needing humans to become good might actually contain the key to solving the puzzle. The potential key is located in the notion of self-direction that Taylor makes reference to. It is highly plausible that the goodness that inheres in good human souls can only be realized through self-direction. While Kant presents the idea that human virtue cannot arise through external forces or mere inclinations most forcefully (G 4:398; MM 6:392 and 6:409), expressions of this insight are observed in the importance that ancient writers place on deliberation, voluntariness, and habituation. Perhaps it is the case that the gods have no reason to tell us (ostensibly beneficial) lies because any sort of outside interference would undermine our progress towards virtue, which must be an exclusively human enterprise. This proposal is akin to soul-building theodicies and replies to hiddenness because it is based on the thought that the gods would be justified in depriving us of an apparent benefit on the grounds that doing so is necessary for the much greater good of our moral development.

Unfortunately, this proposed solution is unlikely to succeed. While it is true that the moral goodness of humans must be developed from within, it is not obvious that being deceived by the gods about certain matters would preclude such development. Just as being told a noble lie by philosophers doesn't impede the moral progress of non-philosophers, being

told similar lies by the gods shouldn't either. Here one might reply that the relevant difference is that a beneficial lie from another human being occurs as part of a shared human pursuit of virtue, whereas a lie from a god constitutes outside interference that either prevents true virtue or diminishes its value. However, while it is plausible that the value inhering in the moral goodness of humans depends on a certain level of autonomous agency being realized, the relevant notion of autonomy does not involve a lack of assistance from non-human agents. Rather, what is plausibly required is that the moral disposition develops through reasoning and free choice (likely with the aid of habituation and moral education) rather than through narrow-minded concern for personal profit or fear of punishments. Occasional lies told to the ignorant or insane, and broad deceptions such as the noble lie, do not preclude exercise of the relevant capacities, whether told by philosopher-rulers or by gods. Hence, even if the gods greatly desire that humans become good, this wouldn't explain why they never have reasons to lie.

8.4 Friendship and Self-Sufficiency

Our preferred solution to the divine deception puzzle is found by focusing on U3, which holds that lies can be useful for preventing so-called friends from doing something bad through ignorance or insanity. Gods have no such need because they are not friends with the ignorant or insane (2.382e).

Now, even the best humans are occasionally ignorant and experience fits of mania. For example, in Book 8 Socrates says that the Kallipolis will eventually decay because the philosopher-rulers "fail to ascertain the periods of good fertility and of infertility," leading to children being born when they should not have been (546a7–b4). This is evidence that even philosopher-rulers will have some ignorance. Moreover, in Book 9 Socrates expresses doubts about the human ability to eradicate vicious appetitive desires completely:

> Wouldn't someone who maintains that just things are profitable be saying, first, that all our words and deeds should insure that the human being [i.e. the reasoning part of the soul] within this human being has the most control; second, that he should take care of the many-headed beast [i.e. the appetitive part of the soul] as a farmer does his animals, feeding and domesticating the gentle heads and hindering the savage ones from growing?
>
> (589a6–b3)

The need to control the growth of vicious desires suggests that they might never be eradicated entirely (cf. 9.571b–c). Hence, it seems that all humans will succumb to some moments of ignorance and insanity.

These defects might lead one to infer that gods have no relationship with humans whatsoever.

This appears to be what Allan Bloom holds:

> A further important consequence of the discussion about the gods follows from the fact that the gods do not lie. In the discussion with Cephalus it was indicated that just as human justice sometimes requires not repaying debts, so it sometimes requires not telling the truth. *That gods never lie would seem to imply that they have nothing to do with men and are not their friends.* The world in which men live contains evil as well as good, and, although the dominance of the good in the *cosmos* at large is reassuring for the human estate, it does not perfect it. Men cannot live like the gods. Later we are told that rulers must lie; hence the gods are not rulers, and rulers cannot imitate the virtues of gods. Statesmen require a human prudence in which the gods can give them no guidance.
>
> (1991, 353, emphasis added)

Although Bloom is onto something, there are passages suggesting that humans can have a relationship with gods. For example, when conversing with Thrasymachus in Book 1, Socrates says that injustice will make one an enemy of the just, and because the gods are just (352a11), "an unjust person will be an enemy of the gods, while a just person will be their friend [*philos*]" (352b2–3). Socrates reaffirms this at the end of the dialogue:

> But if we are persuaded by me, we'll believe that the soul is immortal and able to endure every evil and every good, and always hold to the upward path, practicing justice with wisdom every way we can, so that we'll be friends [*philoi*] to ourselves and to the gods, both while we remain here on Earth and when we receive the rewards of justice, and go around like victors in the games collecting prizes; and so both in this life and on the thousand-year journey we have described, we shall fare well.
>
> (10.621c2–d3)

So Bloom's assertion that humans are not friends of the gods needs to be qualified—as long as we are just and virtuous, we will be dear to the gods; however, if we are unjust and vicious, we will become their enemy.[11] But Bloom's general suggestion that the lack of divine deception is somehow connected to human deficiencies is on the right track. What is needed is an account of exactly how the negative features of human beings along with the divine attributes of the gods explain why the gods never have reasons to lie.

Now, because the gods are self-sufficient, they have no need to entangle themselves with enemies.[12] We, however, are not so lucky. Cities exist

because "none of us is self-sufficient [*autarkēs*], but we all need many things" (2.369b7–9). For this reason, the "real creator" of a city is "our need [*hē hēmetera chreia*]" (369c10). In fact, those who can provide no benefit to the city (or to themselves) will be expelled from it. Socrates, for example, wants to follow Asclepius' "political method" of not providing treatment for someone "who couldn't live a normal life, *since such a person would profit neither himself nor his city*" (3.407e1–3, emphasis added).[13]

We see that Plato believes that human relationships develop from human needs, and that those who are incapable of fulfilling these needs should not be individuals with whom we interact (at least not in the Kallipolis). Because one can benefit another human being only if one has some good quality, this reveals that goodness is a normative constraint on relationships—one should be in a relationship with another person only if that person has some good feature.

This idea is directly stated in Book 1 when Socrates analyzes Polemarchus' account of justice as benefiting friends and harming enemies. Socrates inquires as to whether a friend (*philos*) is someone who seems useful (*chrēstos*) or is useful (334c). Initially, Polemarchus suggests that a friend is one who seems useful. Socrates points out, however, that people are mistaken about who is useful (334c). Those who make this mistake are friends with bad (*kakoi*) people and are enemies to good (*agathoi*) people, which is problematic since it means that justice amounts to benefiting bad people and harming good people (334c–d). This leads Polemarchus to adjust his view: a friend is someone who both seems useful and is useful (334e–335a). Hence, on this view "the friend will be the good person and the enemy the bad person" (335a3–4). In this passage, we see Plato move freely from talking about a person as useful (*chrēstos*) to talking about a person as good (*agathos*). This is because all beneficial things are so in virtue of promoting goodness. This demonstrates that a necessary condition for friendship is goodness.

We have seen that humans form societies out of need and that this requires cooperating with people who are (in some sense) unjust. And, according to the definition of "enemy" put forth in the preceding discussion, this means that humans must willingly cooperate and interact with some of their enemies. This is why U3 involves benefiting one's so-called friends who are about to engage in wrongdoing through ignorance or insanity. They are so-called friends because insofar as they are unjust, they stand towards us as enemies—but because they are partly just and useful, they also stand towards us as friends.[14]

This discussion dovetails with the overall lesson of the noble lie. As noted in earlier chapters, there are two purposes behind the noble lie: to unify the city by teaching the citizens that they are all siblings (3.414d–e), and to separate the city by teaching the citizens that they are each naturally suited to specific tasks (3.415a–c; see also Vlastos 1999c, 144; Schofield

2007, 2009; Bloom 1991, 364–369; and Calabi 1998). The division of the city is an implementation of Socrates' "principle of specialization" (2.370a–c and 2.374a–e), which secures that those unqualified for a ruler or auxiliary position will never be assigned those roles. But this division makes the city vulnerable to faction and civil war. If the rulers and auxiliaries believe they are inherently superior to the producers, then they are more likely to treat them with unequal regard. Hence, part of the purpose of the noble lie is to counteract this line of thinking and to make the citizens "care more for the city and each other" (3.415d2–3). The noble lie attempts to do this by teaching the citizens that they are a family and that each member of that family has a unique role and function in the city.

Socrates reaffirms this in Book 5 when he says that all citizens should rejoice and be pained by the same successes and failures (462b). Socrates illustrates this with an example. When a person hurts their finger, the entire body and soul in unison share in the pain with the part that is afflicted (462c–d). So too, should it be in the case of an individual and the polis. When an individual citizen feels pain, the entire polis will share his or her experience (462d–e; see also 9.590d–591a; *Leg*. 5.739c–d; Austin 2016; and Vlastos 1999c, 149–50).

With this in mind, we can now see that U2 and U3 collapse into each other in the Kallipolis. Recall that U2 and U3 are:

U2: A lie can be a useful device for deceiving enemies who intend to harm you.

U3: A lie can be a useful device for preventing your "friends" from doing something bad out of ignorance or insanity.

As it stands now, there are two differences between U2 and U3: (a) U2 benefits oneself, while U3 benefits another; and (b) U2 deals with enemies, while U3 deals with friends.

From the foregoing discussion, we know that a friend is someone who is good and useful, while an enemy is someone who is bad and harmful. We also know that if someone is of no use to us or is completely bad, they are in no way our friend and will be cast aside. Thus, the polis comprises citizens who have the potential to benefit or harm us, depending on how they behave. If a producer stops producing and tries to rule, the whole city will be harmed. Likewise, if an auxiliary starts bullying weaker citizens, the whole city will suffer. This means that anyone who does something unjust in the city is an enemy, and we all have a reason to prevent him or her from doing this unjust act since it will harm us. Moreover, we have a reason to benefit them as a friend, since each citizen who is allowed to live in the Kallipolis plays a pivotal role in its success or failure. Therefore, in the Kallipolis, U2 and U3 both involve considerations of self-interest: the lying agent benefits herself by preventing the other individual from harming her. If we are right about this, then we can

appeal to the same considerations to explain why both U2 and U3 do not apply to the gods: because the gods cannot be vulnerable to external threats, they have no reason to deceive enemies or so-called friends who are suffering from ignorance or insanity. Nor do they have reason to engage in widespread deceptions such as the noble lie in order to avoid the instability and danger of an unjust society.

The foregoing constitutes part of our preferred solution to the divine deception puzzle. However, it is not the complete solution because there appear to be examples of gods doing good things for humans even when there is no obvious benefit for themselves. For instance, the gods benefit bad people by giving them just punishments (2.380b), are responsible for all good things (2.379c), and sent the world Socrates so that he might assist us (*Ap*. 22a, 23b, 28e, 29e–30b, and 38a). If the self-sufficiency of the gods doesn't preclude them from having reasons to confer these benefits on humans, then why should it preclude them from having reasons to tell useful lies?

This leads us back to the initial solution we considered, which is that lying is intrinsically bad. Although Plato clearly doesn't think that lying is categorically wrong, he does seem to think that it is inherently bad and something to be utilized only in exceptional circumstances. Lies can be useful only within an already defective state of affairs, and while those who are entangled in such circumstances can be justified in lying, the justification doesn't eliminate the unsavory residue of the lie. Socrates might have simply appealed to this inherent badness and declared that the gods do not lie because they are incapable of doing inherently bad things (along the lines of Vlastos' suggestion). But as we have seen, Socrates instead opts for the strategy of explaining why lying is never useful for gods.

There are a few possible reasons for this choice. First, Socrates might think that a bare appeal to the moral perfection of the gods is too easy and not a fully satisfying explanation. Second, he might think that describing the gods as incapable of lying would highlight a lack of power rather than a praiseworthy nature. In either case, it is clear that he wants to vindicate the veracity of the gods by demonstrating that they have no reason to lie.

We have already explained why the reasons that sometimes justify human lies do not apply to the gods—the gods are self-sufficient and humans are not. But we also need to know why the gods wouldn't tell useful lies for reasons similar to those that justify other benefits they confer on humans such as just punishments, sending people like Socrates to assist us, and being the cause of all things good. And here the best explanation is that lying is distinct from those other acts because it is intrinsically bad. Again, Socrates doesn't go for the easy explanation of claiming that the gods are *incapable* of doing anything intrinsically bad. So, what must be taken for granted in the discussion is that the gods never have *reasons* to do things that are intrinsically bad. This might seem odd given

Socrates' view that humans can be justified in doing intrinsically bad things. But the case of humans is different because, as we have seen, their interdependence means that their "material welfare" (e.g. health, security, enjoyment) necessitates lying on occasion. Hence, sometimes a human being's material needs can give her sufficient reason to lie, despite the inherent badness of lying.

Here one might object that even if the gods don't need to lie in order to secure their material welfare, they still have reasons to lie when doing so would lead to overall good consequences in the cosmos. It does seem strange that, when it comes to beneficial lies, the inherent badness of lying can be rationally overridden only if the agent's own material welfare necessitates it. But this begins to make sense when we consider the eudaimonist conception of rationality that Plato is operating under.

While eudaimonism is not, as some critics suggest, merely a disguised form of brute egoism, it does posit an inextricable link between one's normative reasons and one's own flourishing. Specifically, in order for an agent to have a reason to φ, φ-ing must be beneficial to the agent in one of two respects: either the act must promote the agent's material welfare or it must promote what we might call, for lack of a better term, the agent's "spiritual welfare."[15] Spiritual welfare is promoted when the agent partakes in justice and goodness by acting virtuously and living in accordance with nature. In many cases, one can promote one's spiritual welfare through acts that do not directly promote one's material welfare. For instance, when a philosopher-ruler returns to the cave, she sacrifices opportunities to enjoy contemplation in order to act justly, which is good for her soul (7.520d–521b).[16] Likewise, when the gods act as shepherds or distribute just punishments, they do not attain pleasure or other material gains. However, they do benefit through partaking in justice and acting in a manner befitting their nature.

Unfortunately, some acts that might ultimately increase the amount of justice and goodness in the world are not good for the individual's soul. This is because some acts are inherently bad, and their badness precludes spiritual benefits for the agent even if the act could lead to good consequences for others. Indeed, it might be appropriate to call the case of the ruler telling beneficial lies a "mixed case." The lies benefit society and oneself indirectly, but they aren't purely good since they involve the dirtiness of falsehood and deception. Hence, although the gods love justice and the good, and they could conceivably increase the amount of justice in the world by telling noble lies to humans, the intrinsic badness of lying means that they don't have any soul-based reasons to tell these lies. Nor do they have any material-based reasons to lie (as explained by U2 and U3). And while human beings do not have soul-based reasons to lie, they do have material-based reasons because of their lack of self-sufficiency and the nature of their social relations, and because of this, sometimes a philosopher-ruler is justified in lying.

The most contentious element of our preferred solution is the idea that the inherent badness of lying precludes the possibility of having non-material reasons to lie. Given that lies can have tremendously positive consequences, including the facilitation of justice in society, one might reasonably hold that telling a beneficial lie can bring the agent all the benefits normally associated with partaking in justice and goodness. Hence, our proposal involves a fairly strong indictment of lying. But strongly negative views of lying are not implausible in themselves, as evidenced by their prevalence in the history of moral philosophy—most notably in Kant (G 4:402 and G 4:429–431). And note that the position we are attributing to Plato is weaker than the Kantian line insofar as there is no categorical prohibition on lying. The claim is only that lying is intrinsically bad, and this badness prevents one from attaining a direct moral/spiritual benefit from telling lies, even when these lies benefit others.[17] This is not a far-fetched position, and there are good reasons to attribute it to Plato. This would help explain why Socrates doesn't consider whether the gods could tell justice-facilitating lies analogous to the noble lie for the same reasons that they confer just punishments and other such benefits. Socrates takes it for granted that the intrinsic badness of lying means that the gods cannot have soul-based reasons to lie, even if such lies might be useful for promoting justice in others. He thus chooses to focus his attention on explaining why gods cannot have material-based reasons to lie. With soul-based reasons implicitly ruled out and material-based reasons explicitly ruled out, Socrates establishes that the gods and the divine are "in every way free from falsehood" (2.382e6).

8.5 Friends to the Gods

We have argued that because of the intrinsic badness of lying, the gods' self-sufficiency means that they have no reason to lie, whereas humans' dependency means that they should lie occasionally. However, this raises the question of why the gods would have any relationship with humans at all. If the gods are entirely self-sufficient, why would goodness make us friends to the gods? This is particularly puzzling since friendship in the *Republic* appears to depend on need and use.

One possible solution involves expanding the notion of self-sufficiency such that it allows for a need-based friendship between gods and humans. Recall our earlier discussion of the *Euthyphro* and Taylor's suggestion that the gods need human beings to develop virtue on their own so that their project of creating a good world can be completed. Starting from this suggestion, we can distinguish between two notions of self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency can mean the ability to complete an activity by oneself. Examples of activities construed this way would be a general acting virtuously in battle or a philosopher contemplating the Forms. Under this

conception of self-sufficiency, the gods are clearly self-sufficient: the gods do not require anything from humans in order to excel at their activities.

However, we can also think of self-sufficiency in terms of completing projects, such as a general winning the battle or a philosopher publishing a book. The gods may not be self-sufficient under this conception of self-sufficiency. The gods may have the project of the world being the greatest possible place, and for this to happen the world needs good human souls, which are self-directed souls. Thus, the gods cannot complete this project without the help of humans actually becoming good on their own. This explanation for why the gods would be friends with humans has the merit of positing a reasonable motive for the purported relationship: it is plausible that the gods have the aim of making the world as good as it can be and hence that human moral development is needed. Nonetheless, this view faces three problems.

First, appealing to a notion of self-sufficiency that allows for this type of need requires significant strain. For it would seem that the completion of one's projects is central to one's *eudaimonia*, and hence if the gods need human beings for the completion of their projects, then their *eudaimonia* is partly in human hands. This is certainly not the notion of self-sufficiency that we typically associate with the gods.

Second, it is unlikely that Socrates would accept that the gods lack the power to make humans virtuous. As Mark McPherran explains, "*If* Socrates holds that the gods created and implanted our souls, then he would probably hold that they have the power to radically affect the structure and contents of our souls" (1996, 68). McPherran notes that Xenophon attributes to Socrates a commitment to the antecedent (*Mem.* 1.4.13–14), and that Socrates comes close to endorsing the antecedent in the *Euthyphro* (15a1–2, emphasis added) when he says, "There is *no* good for us they [the gods] do not give." Further, according to Xenophon, Socrates allows that the gods put beliefs into people (*Mem.* 1.4.16), and at the end of the *Meno* Socrates claims that human beings can only become virtuous through divine dispensation (99b–100c).[18]

Third, and finally, even if it is granted that under such circumstances the gods would still possess some type of self-sufficiency and Socrates would accept this view of the gods, it would be hard to see how the gods could have no reason to tell lies that might facilitate just behavior in human beings. For certainly the fact that φ-ing will help lead to the completion of one's projects is a reason for one to φ (this would be an example of what we have been calling a material-based reason). Hence, it is worth considering an alternative explanation for Plato's claims that the just among human beings are friends of the gods.

We have seen that human friendship emerges from need and that friendship is preserved by recognizing mutual usefulness. However, this doesn't preclude a disjunctive account of friendship which consists in either goodness or usefulness. We have been discussing friendship in the

context of humans, and because humans need others and no human is perfectly good, we have yet to consider a friendship based solely on goodness. Since the gods are in need of nothing, they will only form friendships on the basis of goodness. So, by making ourselves good, we can become friends with the gods.

This answer still leaves us wondering why the gods would want to be friends with anyone, even if the person is good. An answer is suggested in Book 5, where Socrates describes the dispositions of a philosopher (or a philosopher in training). He begins by describing what it is to love something. He explains that the lover of boys loves all boys, even if they have apparent defects (474c–475a). Likewise, the lover of wine loves all wine (475a). The lover of honor loves honor so much that if they can't be the leader of the military, they will take a lesser position, and if they can't have that, they will take an even lesser position—they will do whatever it takes to receive honor (475a–b). The lover of wisdom (or philosopher), like these individuals, loves all wisdom and not just a particular part (475b–c). Provided that the gods love goodness, it makes perfect sense for them to love humans when they are good, since this is just a particular instance of Plato's principle of what it is to love something.[19]

In this context, we see that Plato uses "friend" in a particular and rather loose sense when he claims that good humans are friends of the gods. Such "friendship" is not a relationship involving reciprocal caring and mutual benefits. All that the relationship consists in is an attitude of approval from the gods directed towards these humans. This might seem to imply that the gods would have reasons to tell lies that could facilitate human beings becoming good. However, it is perfectly reasonable for one to be a lover of *X* and approve of all members of the set of things that are *X* without desiring to maximize the quantity of *X* or the proportion of objects that are members of the relevant set. For instance, if you love great music and approve of those who create it, you are not thereby under a rational requirement to desire the creation of even more great music and thus have reasons to facilitate the development of new musical talent. For while you will approve of any new great music that is created, this doesn't mean you will benefit from it. For it may be the case that the great music already in existence is enough for you to receive the maximum benefits. Likewise, it may be that while the gods will approve of anyone who becomes good, adding members to the set of good individuals doesn't constitute a benefit for them.

8.6 The Merits of Plato's Views

Despite his belief that lying is occasionally warranted as a means of facilitating justice, Plato denies that the gods ever have reasons to lie. We have argued that the best explanation for this centers on the fact that the gods are self-sufficient and humans are not. Self-sufficient beings

gain no material advantage from lying, and the inherent badness of it precludes any spiritual benefit. In contrast, because humans depend on each other to live well, this means that they must interact with people who are sometimes good and sometimes bad. Given the nature of human dependency, when fellow citizens act wrongly, everyone is harmed. Thus, human welfare sometimes necessitates beneficial lies, despite the intrinsic badness of lying.

As noted at the outset of this chapter, philosophers and theologians typically claim that divine deception is incompatible with God's goodness because lying is categorically wrong. The problem with this answer, as Marin Mersenne pointed out to Descartes, is that we can conceive of good parents lying to their children in order to benefit them; thus, deception doesn't always appear to be incompatible with benevolence. For those religions that take God to be like a benevolent parent, adherents must explain why deception and benevolence are incompatible for God but not for parents. Of course, one could respond to Mersenne's objection by arguing that lying is never morally acceptable, but such a position will appeal only to those with staunch Kantian intuitions.

Plato's answer avoids this trouble by denying that lying is always wrong. In this respect, we find his account of divine deception favorable. Two additional features of his view (as we have interpreted him) strike us as quite plausible: (1) that the gods do not benefit from human conduct; (2) that humans do not have personal relationships with gods—we can at most become dear to them by becoming good and valuing what they value. Many theists will want to resist Plato's view because they believe that we can develop personal relationships with God, and that God loves us even when we fail to do good. Though our sympathies are with Plato on these issues, a proper adjudication of this dispute requires its own substantial treatment.

There is one important point on which we disagree with Plato regarding divine dishonesty. If lies can sometimes help us to become just and good, then we believe this would give the gods ethical reasons to lie to us even if doing so would not benefit them in any way. Perhaps these reasons are outweighed by other considerations. But since we agree with Plato that lying is not always wrong, and we also accept that lies can facilitate justice, we do not see adequate grounds for ruling out the possibility that the gods occasionally deceive us.

8.7 Summary

The previous chapter argued that the Philosopher Claim is false—Plato believes that both philosophers and non-philosophers can benefit from falsehood. Given Plato's views of moral psychology and early childhood education, the non-reasoning parts of philosophers' souls believe in and benefit from the useful falsehoods of the Kallipolis. Chapters 4 and 5

corroborate this claim to the extent that in these chapters practical benefits justify Socrates in risking falsehood. Accordingly, we see that Plato's Pragmatism allows for even the most philosophical of individuals to benefit from falsehoods.

In this chapter, we explained why the gods never have reason to lie even though all humans can stand to benefit from deception. This discussion not only informs us about Plato's theological commitments and his notion of friendship, it also helps explain the ethical status of falsehood and deception. While the Alethic Interpretation is correct in holding that some badness inheres in all lies and that falsehood always reveals defectiveness, it is wrong in its assessment of the general human condition (including that of philosopher-rulers and even Socrates himself). To be a human is to require falsehood and deception—this is one of the key respects in which we differ from the gods.

Notes

1 For an overview of how Christian theologians and philosophers have addressed this issue throughout history, see Denery (2015).
2 When discussing god, Plato frequently alternates between the singular and the plural. For a discussion, see Van Riel (2013, 36–37).
3 In comparing Plato's philosophical theology to Christian philosophical theology, we do not mean to imply that the religious context and beliefs are the same between the Greeks and Christians. The traditional Greek gods often did lie and change shapes (see Pratt 1993). This is why Adeimantus is unsure of whether or not the gods deceive. In denying that the gods deceive, Plato is arguing against the traditions of his culture, and the reasons he gives for denying divine deception are unique in the history of philosophical theology.
4 See also *Tht*. 176a–b; *Leg*. 4.715e–718e; *Ti*. 90b–d; *Phdr*. 247–249c, 253a; *Symp*. 207d; *Phd*. 69a–c; Annas (1999, 52–71); Sedley (1999); and Pradeau (2003).
5 Descartes boldly replies to this objection by saying that he thinks he is "in agreement with all metaphysicians and theologians past and future" that God cannot deceive (AT 7.142/CSM 2.102). Wielenberg (2014) defends the claim that it is conceptually possible for God to deceive for reasons that are similar to those advanced by Mersenne.
6 For a careful study of "godlike" (*theios*), see Van Camp and Canart (1959, 412).
7 One could try to argue that, for Plato, humans never have reason to lie because lying is evil. They could then try to explain away the "lies" in the corpus, but they will have to reconcile this with the evidence we have amassed to the contrary.
8 For a general overview of the problem of evil, see Tooley (2019). Schellenberg (1993) provides the most influential presentation of the problem of divine hiddenness.
9 For an influential presentation of this brand of theodicy, see Hick (2010). For critiques of this strategy, see Tooley (2019). The corresponding response to divine hiddenness is most commonly associated with Kant (C 5:147–148). For criticism of the Kantian response, see Watkins (2010). For a reconstruction and defense of Kant's argument, see Paytas (2017).

10 See *Resp*. 1.335a, 1.352b, 6.501c, 8.560b, 10.612c–613b, 10.621c–d; *Phlb*. 39e; and *Leg*. 4.716e. See also Aristotle *Eth*. *Eud*. 7.3.1238b26–30, 7.10.1242a32–36; and *Eth*. *Nic*. 10.8.1179a23–32; cf. *Eth*. *Nic*. 8.7.1158b33–59a8 and *Mag*. *mor*. 2.11.1208b3–35. In Book 2, Adeimantus contends that we need not fear the gods if (a) they do not exist, (b) they are indifferent to human misconduct, or (c) they can be persuaded (*Resp*. 2.364b–366b; see also *Leg*. 10.885b). The *Republic* ends with the myth of Er, which addresses these concerns. In this myth, we are told that the gods exist and are not indifferent to our conduct in this life. Rather, the gods will love or hate us based on our character and will reward or punish us accordingly (see 10.612c–621d).

11 To be fair, if Bloom uses "friend" in the narrow sense that involves having a give and take relationship of mutual benefit, he is probably right. Still, it is important to note that humans can be friends of the gods in a looser sense that involves attitudes of approval. On this broader notion of "friend," when Socrates says that the just person is a friend to the gods, he means that the gods approve of the virtuousness of the just person and the just person approves of divine qualities. Likewise, when Socrates says that the unjust person is an enemy of the gods it means that the gods disapprove of the viciousness of the unjust person and the unjust person disapproves of divine qualities.

12 Plato doesn't explicitly describe the gods as self-sufficient in the *Republic* (cf. *Ti*. 33d), but we can infer this from his general description. He claims that the gods are the best in every way (2.381b–c), and he describes self-sufficiency as a good (2.369a–b and 3.387d; see also *Phlb*. 67a). Hence, if the gods weren't self-sufficient, then they wouldn't be the best in every way because they would be lacking a good.

13 Speaking of this passage, Vlastos (1999c, 147) writes, "Consider what would happen in this utopia if someone through no fault of his own were to cease being a public asset … What may he then claim now that he may no longer ground his claims on the needs of his job, but only on the value of his individual existence? As I read the *Republic*, the answer is: Nothing." We mostly agree with Vlastos on this point, but Plato's qualification, "neither himself," means that he is not merely thinking about the welfare of the city, but also about the welfare of the individual. That is, Plato believes that some lives are not worth living.

14 In the *Lysis* and *Symposium*, Plato grapples with the question of whether or not friendship (and love) stems from others being useful to us (see especially *Symp*. 200a–b and *Lysis* 215b). For a discussion, see Vlastos (1999c). For Aristotle's account, see *Eth*. *Nic*. 9.9.1169b28–1170a13.

15 Although the distinction between soul-based reasons and material-based reasons is not explicit in the *Republic*, it follows Plato's general distinction between the goods of the body and the goods of the soul. This distinction is made especially clear in the *Laws* (1.631b–632d and 5.726a–729a) and the *Phaedo* (65a–c, 66c–67c, and 68b–c).

16 This is not to deny the possibility that returning to the cave involves a genuine sacrifice. Nor do we mean to deny that conflicts between pursuing justice and one's overall flourishing are possible. It may be that an agent can have decisive reason to perform a just action even though from a prudential standpoint the benefits of the just act are outweighed by the material costs (see White 2002 and Irwin 2004). Buckels (2013, 64–67) provides a nice summary of the various positions on the return to the cave; see E. Brown (2000) and (2004) for a position we are sympathetic to.

17 This is consistent with the possibility of a person *indirectly* gaining a spiritual benefit through falsehood, as is the case with philosophers who utilize falsehoods to combat the motivational defects arising from the non-reasoning

parts of their souls. Such use of falsehoods is not inherently good for the individual, but it does facilitate progress towards becoming just. This obviously doesn't apply to the gods because they do not need spiritual development.

18 Note that even if Socrates is being insincere, the passage is still instructive in demonstrating that it is natural for the Greeks to accept that the gods have the power to dispense virtue.

19 Plato's holistic conception of loving the Good is echoed in one of Sidgwick's key ethical intuitions: "And it is evident to me that as a rational being I am bound to aim at good generally … not merely at a particular part of it" (*Methods* 382).

Coda

> How are you going on? Busy, I suppose, with a full house. For myself, I am only writing this letter because I ought to be reading the history of philosophy and preparing for my lectures "On Ends" [Cicero]. But I hate the history of philosophy even more than any other history; it is so hard to know what any particular man thought, and so worthless when you do know it.
>
> (Henry Sidgwick, "Letter to H. G. Dakyns," *Memoir* 140)

> Philology as knowledge of the ancient world cannot, of course, last forever; its material is exhaustible. What cannot be exhausted is the always new adjustment every age makes to the classical world, of measuring ourselves against it. If we set the philologist the task of better understanding *his own* age by means of antiquity, then his task is eternal.
>
> (Nietzsche, "Notes for 'We Philologists'" 3 [62], 296)

Our primary aim has been to present a plausible case for the view that Plato's general normative outlook is more pragmatic than alethic. We can't reasonably expect to change the minds of all those who hold some version of the Alethic Interpretation. One obvious source of difficulty is that, as Sidgwick rightly points out, it is exceedingly hard to determine the considered views of long-dead philosophers. This is especially true in the case of Plato, given that his chosen format was dialogue rather than exposition. In light of this, the success of revisionary interpretive projects can't be measured by the number of scholars who are entirely persuaded. Our modest hope is that we have done enough to demonstrate that a pragmatic interpretation of Plato is well-supported by the texts, and that it represents an interesting and viable alternative to the myriad alethic readings, even if the matter can never be settled conclusively. Further, we hope that the preceding chapters will open new avenues within Plato scholarship and encourage interpreters to reconsider some of their long-held assumptions, even if only to eventually defend them with renewed vigor.

With these goals in mind, there is still some work left to be done. Among the primary aims of this final chapter are: (1) to summarize our main arguments and synthesize the various principles discussed into the broad normative view that we call Plato's Pragmatism; and (2) to explain

how various passages that most strongly support alethic readings can be rendered consistent with our pragmatic interpretation.

We certainly believe in the value of historical scholarship, but we are sympathetic to the epigraphs: merely knowing what a historical figure believed (assuming this is even possible) is not of especially high importance if nothing further comes of it. In our view, the primary reason for studying philosophers such as Plato is to facilitate the development of one's own answers to vital philosophical questions. In analyzing Plato's arguments, insights, and views, we are attempting to gain a richer understanding of the relevant issues, which can in turn lead to novel arguments and principles that have contemporary relevance. Though the construction of our own Platonically inspired ethics of belief is a project for a different volume, we will utilize some of the remaining space to assess the philosophical merits of Plato's Pragmatism, and to highlight some of the ways in which it has relevance for contested issues in contemporary philosophy—issues that matter not just academically but also personally.

1 Synthesizing Plato's Pragmatism

The three parts of this book have each focused on a particular alethic claim. Part I argued against the Absolutist Evaluative Claim—that Plato views truth as preferable to falsehood in all contexts. We argued that the plausibility of this claim is undermined by numerous examples of useful falsehoods in the *Republic* and *Laws*. Falsehoods such as the noble lie and the religious myths of the *Laws* are important because they facilitate the development of correct ethical commitments in citizens, thereby producing greater harmony within individuals as well as society. While some suggest that the relevant falsehoods are merely allegorical, we have shown that such readings can neither cover all of the cases (e.g. the rigged sexual lottery) nor make sense of the fact that Socrates explicitly states that not everyone understands allegory. Hence, we have good reason to conclude that Plato does in fact endorse the use of genuine deception. We argued further that the best explanation for this is that Plato prioritizes the value of good ethical commitments over the goal of avoiding falsehood. These ethical commitments are just that—commitments; thus, the useful falsehoods that Plato advocates for should not be understood in purely utilitarian terms, but must be conceived from within his eudaimonistic framework—they must be seen as foundational for the production of entrenched and unwavering dispositions.

That being said, there is a sense in which the Absolutist Evaluative Claim is true. In highly idealized circumstances (i.e. circumstances in which all humans are perfectly rational, like the gods), Plato would indeed recommend categorical avoidance of falsehood. However, the flaws of human nature are such that certain falsehoods are necessary for cultivating virtuous citizens and just societies—goals that are more

important than truth. Thus, the Alethic Interpretation is correct in identifying deception and falsehood as flawed, but it is wrong in its failure to properly account for the defective human condition.

Part II targeted the Epistemic Caution Claim—that Plato believes we ought never to form beliefs in the absence of strong evidence. Our primary evidence for the falsity of this claim was Socrates' willingness to engage in motivated reasoning in order to convince himself that he is destined for a happy afterlife in the *Phaedo*. Given the lack of objectively compelling arguments and evidence, the epistemically cautious strategy would have been to abstain from forming a judgment on this matter. But because of the magnitude of the stakes and his reliable epistemic skill, Socrates decided that it was worth risking false belief in order to prevent his mortal nature from causing him to show fear or sorrow when he finally sat for his life's exit exam. We supplemented this evidence with an interpretation of the *Meno* according to which belief in the rationality of inquiry itself is rooted in pragmatic faith rather than objective epistemic warrant. Finally, utilizing the *Euthydemus* and the *Protagoras*, we showed that while one should generally exercise epistemic caution when engaging with sincere interlocutors, there are times when less caution is necessary, such as when one is engaging with sophists—this latter point suggests that there is value in engaging with seemingly false views.

Part III challenged the Philosopher Claim—that Plato believes that philosophers could never benefit from false belief and epistemic risk. Initial evidence against this claim came from our earlier discussion of Socrates' conduct in the *Phaedo* and the *Meno*. The fact that the truest philosopher in history benefited from epistemic risk, and that rational inquiry itself is grounded in pragmatic faith, shows that the usefulness of pragmatic strategies is not limited to commoners. Still, our primary argument against the Philosopher Claim centered on the idea that the non-reasoning part of the soul is (1) vulnerable to affect and desire; (2) unreflective, automatic, and incapable of complex understanding; and (3) relatively fixed at an early age. From these claims, we argued that philosophers will retain the false beliefs taught to them as children in the non-reasoning parts of their souls, and that these false beliefs are useful for sustaining ethical commitments in the face of life's challenges. Finally, we explained why gods are the one category of rational beings that never utilize falsehood or deception. Although the gods could presumably facilitate justice in human beings by telling noble lies, the unsavoriness of lying gives them a strong reason not to do so. While the inherent badness of deception is also a reason for human beings to avoid it, this reason is outweighed by the fact that human frailty and interdependence renders their flourishing highly precarious without the assistance of falsehood. This is not the case for the gods because they are entirely self-sufficient.

Over the course of the previous chapters we have arrived at several principles, dictums, and norms that are key components of Plato's

Pragmatism. Some of these have been rendered explicit and some have remained implicit. The following list includes explicit formulations of most of the key principles:

1. Affective Susceptibility: All human beings (including philosophers) are susceptible to the pernicious influence of affect and desire.
2. Cognitive Limitation: Most human beings are incapable of deep understanding of the most important truths.
3. Dichotomy of Circumspection: The more believable an interlocutor or idea appears, the more caution is needed, while the more ridiculous an interlocutor or idea appears, the less caution is needed—in some cases it is even beneficial to engage with ridiculous individuals.
4. Hierarchy of Truth and Falsehood: It is better to have false ethical explanations (beliefs about what makes an activity, attitude, or end choiceworthy) than false ethical commitments (beliefs about which ends, activities, and attitudes are in fact choiceworthy). In fact, the worst falsehood—the genuine falsehood—is a false ethical commitment. Thus, if there is a conflict between having a true explanation and a true ethical commitment, the latter is given priority.
5. Evaluative Consistency: If an agent genuinely values a normative object for its own sake (as opposed to merely feigning to do so), then she will not reflectively endorse behaviors and attitudes that directly violate the principles and standards of which it is composed.
6. Justified Epistemic Risk: Intentionally risking false belief can be justified as a means of protecting one's character and integrity, as well as promoting virtue in others.
7. Justified Lying: Individual *A* can justifiably lie to individual *B* if *A* occupies an epistemically and morally superior vantage point (to a sufficient degree) with respect to *B*, and *A* has strong reasons to believe that the lie will benefit *B*.
8. Pragmatic Faith: The search for truth often requires a type of faith—one can be justified in believing that an inquiry will succeed even in the absence of clear evidence to support this belief. Sometimes cultivating virtue, and avoiding laziness, cowardice, and nihilism, requires pragmatic faith.
9. *Pro Tanto* Veracity: The inherent disvalue of lying grounds an overridable presumption in favor of truthfulness.
10. Skill-Based Risk Assessment: The amount of epistemic risk that is permissible depends not only on the potential rewards, but also on one's epistemic ability and character: the greater one's ability and character, the more one can permissibly wager.

In considering this list, it becomes clear that the core of Plato's Pragmatism is the belief that while truth and truthfulness are important, they are not as important as ethical ideals such as courage and

(especially) justice—whether in individuals or the city as a whole. Given human limitations, the promotion of justice can conflict with conventional epistemic norms, and when it does, the aim of justice takes precedence. The application of this basic view is well illustrated by the three primary examples we have focused on: the useful lies and persuasion of the *Republic* and *Laws*; Socrates' non-philosophical approach in the *Phaedo*; and the virtue-based justification for faith in the rationality of inquiry in the *Meno*. This general prioritization of the practical over the epistemic is what motivates our attribution of the label "pragmatism" to Plato's philosophy.

2 Counterevidence

Speaking broadly, there are two themes within the Platonic corpus that seemingly tell against our pragmatist reading: (1) Plato's endorsement of a robust commitment to truth and rational inquiry, and (2) his frequent focus on abstract metaphysical issues (which may suggest a prioritization of the theoretical over the practical). We will assess each of these in turn.

2.1 Truth and Rationality

There are numerous passages suggesting a devotion to truth that seems incompatible with the sort of pragmatic reading we've been arguing for. Consider the following examples:

> [T1] Truth heads the list of all things good, for gods and humans alike. Let anyone who intends to be happy and blessed be its partner from the start, so that he may live as much of his life as possible a person of truth. You can trust a person like that, but not the one who is fond of telling voluntary lies (and anyone who is happy to go on producing falsehoods in *ignorance* of the truth is an idiot). Neither state is anything to envy: no one has any friends if he is a fool or can't be trusted.
>
> (*Laws* 5.730c1–6)

> [T2] I'll tell you, even though the love and respect I've had for Homer since I was a child make me hesitate to speak, for he seems to have been the first teacher and leader of all these fine tragedians. All the same, no one is to be honored or valued more than truth.
>
> (*Republic* 10.595b9–c4)

> [T3] Once in a while he [i.e. the judge, Rhadamanthus] inspects another soul, one who has lived a pious life, *one devoted to truth*, the soul of a private citizen or someone else, especially—and I at any rate say this Callicles—that of a philosopher who has minded his

> own affairs and hasn't been meddlesome in the course of his life. He admires the man and sends him off to the Isles of the Blessed.
>
> (*Gorgias* 526c1–5, emphasis added)

> [T4] I prefer nothing, unless it is true.
>
> (*Euthyphro* 14e9)

> [T5] I am the same person I have always been, one who refuses to listen to anyone or anything, however close to me, except the one argument, whichever it is, that appears best by my reckoning. So I can't now just throw out the arguments I used to produce merely because I happen to have found myself in my present situation.
>
> (*Crito* 46b4–8)

These passages do not exhaust the instances of an expressed commitment to truth and rationality within the Platonic corpus, but they are representative of the sorts of claims that seem most damning to our interpretation. Hence, if we can successfully reconcile the above passages with our pragmatic reading, we will have done enough to mitigate the general threat arising from such textual counterevidence; the same considerations we will raise regarding the above passages are generally applicable to similar passages on the topic of truth and rational inquiry.

T1–T3 are similar in that each clearly places a high value on truth. In fact, both T1 and T2 seem to assert that truth is the chief value. But once the relevant context is considered, we see that these passages are far from a categorical endorsement of truth. First, it is difficult to see how these passages could advocate unconditionally for truth without contradicting other passages in their respective texts. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, Plato endorses useful falsehoods in both the *Laws* and the *Republic*, and T3 occurs in the concluding myth of the *Gorgias* (a claim expressed as part of a myth is a poor candidate for a categorical prohibition against non-veridical communication).

Second, the context of each specific passage involves various qualifications and specifications. T1 is explicit in its qualification: "Let anyone who intends to be happy and blessed be its partner from the start, so that he may live *as much of his life as possible* a person of truth" (*Laws* 730c2–4, emphasis added). The modifier "as much of his life as possible" allows for various exemptions. The passages that surround T2 reveal that Socrates isn't upset that Homer speaks untruthfully in general; rather, Socrates is upset that Homer misleads his students about how they should live and what they should value (*Republic* 10.599c–e). That is, Plato's concern in T2 is not about prohibiting all falsehood but rather prohibiting falsehood that leads to the cultivation of bad ethical commitments (i.e. the genuine falsehood). As mentioned, the broader context of T3 is the concluding myth of the *Gorgias*, and despite Socrates' insistence

that the story is a "rational account" (523a1–3), many of the details are clearly false. Hence, in saying that it is a "rational account," we take Socrates to mean that the underlying ethical lesson from the story—that it is in one's own interest to be just rather than unjust—is true.

So rather than take T1–T3 as a categorical endorsement of truth and rejection of falsehood, we maintain that these passages prioritize truths involving ethical commitments while also exhorting us to value truth generally. We have *pro tanto* reasons to be truthful and to avoid falsehood, but these reasons are overridable for the development of well-being and harmony, which involve the inculcation of a privileged set of truths, namely, ethical commitments. Indeed, one of the underlying purposes behind the various principles outlined above is to show how one can value truth and honesty while sometimes approving of falsehood and deception.

T4 and T5 identify truth and rationality as norms of inquiry, but the contexts indicate that these passages do not entail anything as strong as the Alethic Interpretation. The *Euthyphro* passage arises while discussing the relationship between gods and humans. Socrates asks whether it would be correct to say that the relationship involves a "sort of trading skill between gods and men?" (14e6–7) to which Euthyphro replies, "Trading yes, if you prefer to call it that" (14e8). This is the line that precipitates T4. Given the context, this line is plausibly read as a claim about Socrates' preferences and goals while engaging in philosophical inquiry. He is expressing that he has no biases in favor of particular labels or other technical elements of the discussion except insofar as they are accurate and conducive to discovering truth. The fact that Socrates is narrowly focused on the aim of truth while doing philosophy doesn't show that truth is a master value that trumps all other considerations in all contexts. Such a focus is perfectly consistent with the belief that, in rare (and non-ideal) circumstances, the goal of truth must take a back seat to the broad aim of living well and promoting justice.

Consider, finally, T5. When Crito implores Socrates to flee rather than face execution, Socrates responds by insisting that he will do so only if he is convinced by sound reasoning. He emphasizes that they must consider the arguments objectively and avoid being influenced by the severity of the present circumstances. This means that they cannot ignore the conclusions they had carefully arrived at previously when they were calm and dispassionate. Hence, it appears that Socrates is endorsing a commitment to objective and impartial reasoning with the sole goal of reaching true conclusions. This seemingly tells against our claim that Plato is tolerant of motivated reasoning and epistemic risk in some circumstances. Indeed, if there were ever a time for Socrates to deviate from objectivity in debate, one might expect it to be when the ship from Delos was on the verge of arrival. However, we have seen that Socrates does seem to deliberately engage in motivated reasoning while considering the fate of his soul as he prepares to drink the hemlock. If our assessment of that

situation is accurate, then we seem to have a tension between the *Crito* and the *Phaedo*—in the former, Socrates insists on impartial inquiry, and in the latter, he is partial to one side of the debate.

This tension is not as deep as it initially appears. There is a crucial difference between the two sets of circumstances in these dialogues. In the *Crito*, what's at issue is the question of what to do—should Socrates flee and live out the rest of his days in exile, or should he face up to his assigned punishment, however unmerited? In the *Phaedo*, the primary concern is not about what to do—that has already been decided. What's at issue, rather, is the *manner* in which Socrates will conduct himself in his crucial final moments. Will he sit down and cry, like an infant? Will he tremble and moan, like an ungrateful coward? Or will he calmly and lovingly accept his fate as a person of justice, piety, and integrity? As we argued in Chapter 4, Socrates is partial to positive accounts of the afterlife because belief in them will operate as a failsafe in the event that his animal nature and affection for his friends threaten to overwhelm the reasoning part of his soul, potentially causing him to live his final and most important hour in an undignified manner. Although this motivated reasoning puts Socrates at increased risk of false belief, the exceptional circumstances (including features of Socrates as an individual) warrant such risk. Things are importantly different in the *Crito*. Socrates and Crito are attempting to determine which of the available options would be just. When attempting to decide on such matters, there is indeed a prohibition on motivated reasoning and unsound epistemic practices. But this is not because of the value of truth itself—it is because of the value of justice.

The upshot of the foregoing discussion is that, while Plato certainly values truth and veracity, the sad reality of the human predicament is that it involves conflicts between purely epistemic aims and the pursuit of justice and *eudaimonia*. Although the above passages reflect a basic Platonic commitment to truth and truthfulness, they do not address the question of what to do when ethical and epistemic norms conflict. In the preceding chapters, we have seen ample evidence that when such conflicts arise, the commitment to truth has to be relaxed. The fact that Plato seems to endorse the judicious use of myths, political deception, motivated reasoning, and pragmatic faith, strongly suggests that his general normative outlook is more nuanced than strict versions of the Alethic Interpretation allow. If humans were self-sufficient and free from affect, like the gods, Plato presumably would advocate unwavering loyalty to truth. But given our myriad deficiencies as embodied creatures, our general commitment to truth and aversion to falsehood must be tempered by a willingness to occasionally deceive others and even risk falsehood in ourselves. This pragmatic approach is necessary for maintaining the health of our individual souls as well as the harmony of our communities.

2.2 Metaphysics

We have said very little about metaphysics in this book, and yet, a significant portion of Plato's writings, including his ethical writings, concerns metaphysics. By way of example, four of our chapters center on the *Republic*, but we have mostly ignored the intricacies of the "line," the "sun," and the "cave." In light of Plato's consistent focus on metaphysis—especially concerning the connection between value and reality—one might worry that our pragmatic interpretation, which makes no reference to metaphysics, involves a significant oversight.

By way of response to this objection, we'd first like to point out that nothing in our pragmatic reading precludes Plato from wanting to understand the theoretical nature of things for its own sake; nor does it preclude the view that contemplative activity enhances one's life. But to get to the crux of the matter, we must consider the general role of metaphysics with respect to the overall argument of the *Republic*. The central task of the *Republic* is to explain what justice is and why it is always better to be just than unjust. If one were to edit out Books 5–7 (and 10), what remains would largely be sufficient for answering these two questions. Why is that so? Two reasons. First, interest in the "what is justice?" question arises as a means of answering the question of whether it is always better to be just than unjust. This suggests that the goal of investigating the nature of justice in the *Republic* is not to acquire perfect knowledge of justice for its own sake, but rather to arrive at a working conception of justice that is robust enough to answer the central question of whether justice is worth pursuing. What the interlocutors need is a general sense of the nature of both justice and *eudaimonia*, as well as a grasp of the relationship between the two. If one can show an intimate connection between justice and well-being, then one can sufficiently motivate the answer that it always pays to be just even without comprehensive accounts of the nature of justice and human flourishing.

Second, as Bernard Williams points out, Socrates, by his own admission, doesn't understand the Form of the Good. And yet, he still takes himself to have met the central challenge of the *Republic*:

> so it must be possible to understand why justice is a final good without understanding adequately, or barely at all, what the one and only intrinsic good is, or what is involved in its theoretical contemplation. We can understand Socrates' answer because we can gather from this account at least the following: that the wise or rational person needs to regard justice as a final good, and that he can make sense of it as a final good.
>
> (2006, 129–130)

If Socrates takes himself to have met the challenge without a complete understanding of the Forms, and his answer is understandable to the

reader, then, presumably, by Plato's own lights, the Forms are not necessary for answering the central question of the *Republic*.

If the account of metaphysics in Books 5–7 isn't needed to complete the argument of the *Republic*, why include it at all? Besides the aforementioned reasons—that theoretical investigation might be valued for its own sake and improve one's life—such an examination can enhance the argument of the *Republic* by providing an answer to a certain kind of skeptic. Echoes of Protagoras, Thrasymachus, and Callicles resound in the arguments of anti-realists in contemporary meta-ethical debates. Although they deny the existence of stance-independent ethical facts, most anti-realists agree that we have sufficient reason to be ethical. These reasons are ostensibly grounded in facts about one's own desires and emotions, as well as the structure of society. However, many meta-ethical realists worry about the contingency of these reasons—if society undergoes radical changes, or if a particular individual's psychology diverges significantly from what is typical, then there might not be sufficient reason to act justly. Plato's meta-ethical work, too, is an attempt to respond to this type of contingency. It is an attempt to show that the normative force of justice doesn't contingently depend on our motivations or societal structure. By binding his rational eudaimonism to his moral realism, Plato is attempting to show that our reasons to be just and aim for virtue are categorical, that is, universal and inescapable. Hence, on our reading, Plato's work in metaphysics plays an important role in grounding the normative force of ethics, but it needn't play a central role in an agent's general deliberation and ethical behavior.

3. The Philosophical Merits of Plato's Pragmatism

In this final section of the book, we would like to discuss the plausibility and utility of Plato's Pragmatism divorced from any questions of interpretative adequacy. Even if Plato did not hold the pragmatic view that we've attributed to him, the arguments and ideas we've explored in the preceding chapters are worth considering in their own right. Is Plato's Pragmatism philosophically viable? Does it contain resources that might be useful for contemporary philosophical debates?

The view we have attributed to Plato is obviously relevant for subareas of normative philosophy such as the ethics of belief and virtue epistemology. But Plato's Pragmatism also has relevance for specific debates of high interest from across the philosophical landscape on topics such as esoteric morality, democracy vs. epistocracy, the value-ladenness of science, dissemination of scientific knowledge to non-experts, and the general question of progress in philosophy, to name just a few. Given the breadth of relevant topics, we could not hope to cover them all in anything approximating adequate detail. Our more modest goal is to summarize the strengths and weaknesses of the key elements of Plato's

Pragmatism and to indicate some of the most likely points of interest for recent developments in contemporary philosophy.

3.1 Authoritative Deception

In Part I, we argued that Plato endorses epistemic/moral authorities utilizing beneficial falsehoods for the sake of cultivating true ethical commitments in the populace. Few today would endorse the vast political deception found in Plato's works (see Fricker 2007). The most viable legacy of his authoritative deception occurs in narrower domains, such as research in science. Some scholars argue that, given the volatile political climate and the potentially destabilizing social effects of certain scientific discoveries, it is best that scientists withhold certain information, convey information in a misleading/deceptive way, or avoid certain domains of research altogether. Phillip Kitcher (1997 and 2001), for instance, worries that research into the relationship between social identity and IQ will negatively affect disadvantaged groups, while Stephen John (2018) is concerned that honest communication about climate change will lead to misunderstandings that further fuel climate change denial. Though both philosophers express concerns about the perniciousness of deception, manipulation, and the general withholding of information by experts, they judge that the potential costs are too significant for experts to engage in direct and honest communication (cf. Lane 2014; Aikin and Talisse 2017, Chap. 11).

These positions correspond closely to Plato's Pragmatism because they involve (1) an epistemic authority with privileged access to information, (2) distrust of a novice's ability to understand and respond to information correctly (either due to lack of ability or manipulative forces), (3) an endorsement of (immediate) epistemic harm for the sake of practical benefits, and (4) caution about (3). In other words, these positions involve adherence to versions of the hierarchy of falsehoods, the justified lying principle, *pro tanto* veracity, and perhaps cognitive limitation.

Though we are sympathetic to the concerns and ends that motivate the positions of Kitcher, John, and others, we are not very confident about the merits of such authoritative deception (though we remain open-minded). If such deception would indeed foster the development of correct ethical commitments within citizens and lead to a just and harmonious society, this would be enough to outweigh the intrinsic unsavoriness of paternalistic deception. But the obvious problem is that it is hard to see how such large-scale lies could be preserved indefinitely within modern society. And given this difficulty, the risk of a complete breakdown of trust between citizens and authority is sufficient to rule out noble lies as a viable option.

Consider a present-day example. In the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic, the US Surgeon General tweeted, "Seriously people – STOP BUYING MASKS! They are NOT effective in preventing general public

from catching #Coronavirus, but if healthcare providers can't get them to care for sick patients, it puts them and our communities at risk!" This generated confusion among the public: why would masks be effective for doctors but not ordinary people (the people who walk the streets every day)? Healthcare experts did little to garner civic trust when they later suggested that everyone should wear masks in public places and that part of the purpose of the previous message was to ensure that there were enough masks available for doctors and nurses (see Tufekci 2020).

One might object that this is merely a bad application of authoritative deception. That may be, but it still speaks to the precarious nature of this approach. In contemporary society, the public already mistrusts experts and authority figures, and discovering authoritative deception only fuels skepticism and conspiratorial thinking. Further, technology such as the internet and smartphones makes it easier than ever for lies to be uncovered. This is deeply problematic because experts often provide crucial information, and trust in institutions like the government, the media, and universities is essential for the flourishing of society. Given that (1) the consequences of discovering deception can be dire, (2) it is difficult to keep large-scale deceptions secret in a modern, free society, and (3) authority figures are prone to misuse deception (both accidentally and maliciously), there must be a very strong presumption—stronger than the presumption endorsed by Plato—in favor of veracity in the public domain, especially on the part of those who occupy positions of leadership or represent important institutions.

That said, we do not endorse a categorical prohibition on authoritative deception. Given that extreme circumstances can arise in which the costs of veracity are simply too steep, the door to deception must always be left ajar. In very much the spirit of *Republic* 1 (331b–c), examples might include physicians deceiving unruly patients in ways that align with the patients' prior expressed desires (Pugh 2015). We can also imagine a scenario in which an elected official must lie in order to avoid a catastrophe such as nuclear war.

Authoritative deception can also be acceptable when the content of the lie is such that if the false aspect were discovered, trust wouldn't be diminished. Though we were disappointed when we discovered that our parents had lied to us about Santa Claus, this deception did not result in a general loss of trust. This is presumably because we recognized that the deception occurred in the spirit of enhancing the joy and wonderment of childhood, and there was little risk of harm. Accordingly, we are open to the idea of using myths (presented as truth) that are likely to enrich one's life with minimal risk of harm. This is especially true in the case of moral education, as when myths are used to widen one's circle of concern or otherwise improve one's character. In such cases, one's learning that the myth was not actually true needn't be destabilizing because the deep ethical truth underlying the myth remains intact. While moral education is

typically conceived of as part of childhood and adolescence, it is really a lifelong process. Hence, the use of ethically instructive myths and similar deceptions may be justifiable even in the case of adults. While we wouldn't go as far as to say that lies are what bind society together (Appiah 2018), certain types of deception and falsehood can be an important part of maintaining a secure foundation.

In sum, while Plato's Pragmatism is too liberal in its use of authoritative deception, it is correct in holding that the proper approach to communicating multifaceted information across a range of people is far more complex than a simple maxim of exceptionless veracity (see Stanley 2015 and Holland 1996). Observance of the effects of social media and ratings-driven news broadcasts undoubtedly supports Plato's general concern that careless and unregulated communication can lead to demagoguery and divisiveness (Tosi and Warmke 2020; Fantl 2018). Plato's question of how to balance honesty and openness with the preservation of epistemic authority, objective values, and psychological health is very much the question of our day.

3.2 Epistemic Risk

The heart of Part II is a rejection of Clifford's principle that it is always wrong to believe on insufficient evidence. Broadly speaking, defenses of Clifford's principle have taken two forms (see McCormick 2015, Chaps. 1–3). The first involves making a conceptual connection between beliefs, truth, and evidence such that it is conceptually impossible for a belief to do anything but aim at truth and be responsive to evidence (see Adler 2002; Shah 2003; Wedgwood 2002; and B. Williams 1973, Chap. 9). The second involves the normative claim that one is doing something morally bad by not believing solely for evidential reasons (see Aikin 2014; Aikin and Talisse 2017, Chap. 4; and Wood 2002, Chap. 1).[1] Both of these claims have stronger and weaker versions, and when we measure Plato's Pragmatism up against them, the view we attribute to Plato comes off as rather moderate.

With respect to the former claim, what seems clear is that we don't have full-doxastic control such that we can believe at will something that strikes us as false.[2] Thus, we are sympathetic to arguments against the possibility of direct self-deception or believing against what one presently takes to be decisive evidence. However, Plato's Pragmatism doesn't involve either form of doxastic voluntarism—it requires only the possibility of planned motivated reasoning and believing a proposition for which one lack's sufficient evidence for or against its truth. These modes of belief formation are more judicious, and it is likely that denying their possibility is more controversial than their acceptance.

With respect to the normative position, it is unlikely that many have ever accepted Clifford's commandment in its most stringent form. As

Allen Wood (2002, 38) points out, this is probably because of the "always, everywhere, and for anyone" clause, or what Jan Vorstenbosch (1999, 99) calls the "radical deontological stance."[3] Within the ethics of belief literature, philosophers raise countless (and sometimes far-flung) thought experiments as objections to Clifford; these typically take something like the following form: "Clifford's principle is wrong because it would be wrong not to believe *X* on insufficient evidence if believing *X* would save your family from an evil villain." Wood (2002, 38) argues that examples like this are "cheap and wrongheaded" because they misunderstand Clifford's claim and how ethical principles work. While it's true that such thought experiments can feel artificial, if a principle runs up against numerous counterexamples, it can begin to appear suspect and of little use for guiding action. One of the advantages of Plato's Pragmatism is that it acknowledges the value of sound epistemic practices without putting forth an implausibly stringent prohibition against motivated reasoning and epistemic risk. Moreover, the account offers general guidelines for when and why deviation from careful pursuit of truth is warranted. As we have seen, Plato believes that, given our inherent limitations, we can sometimes be justified in taking epistemic risk when doing so is conducive to virtue and justice.

That said, a common objection to ethical outlooks based on virtue rather than categorical rules is that they do not provide clear decision procedures. This objection can certainly be applied to Plato—he doesn't even attempt to put forth a theory that yields determinate answers to all conceivable practical problems. Moreover, Plato's Pragmatism fails to specify the exact circumstances in which a violation of conventional epistemic norms is likely to promote virtue or facilitate justice. While this is certainly a drawback, Platonic philosophy does have one clear advantage over most other systems (including other virtue-based theories) when it comes to the issue of action guidance. One of the distinctive features of Plato's writings is their rich literary texture (see Chappell 2014). The literary aspect of Plato's work might come at the cost of some clarity, but it makes up for this with vivid imagery. Consider the deeply inspiring recounting of Socrates' resolute and contented demeanor in the final minutes of his life, including the unflinching manner in which he raised the cup of hemlock to his lips and drank it down. Such an image allows the reader to actively reflect on what it must have been like for him and his friends, and what anyone ought to do if they find themselves in a similar situation. Of course, none of us will ever find ourselves in these exact circumstances. But the general lessons illustrated by such examples can still serve as a useful foundation for reflection and discussion that can make one more skilled at navigating through the trials and tribulations of human life, as well as serving as a powerful source of inspiration.

The example of Socrates' motivated reasoning in the *Phaedo* has obvious similarities to pragmatic arguments for belief in God and an afterlife,

which have been of ongoing interest among philosophers. Some continue to follow James in arguing that, in the absence of conclusive evidence for or against the existence of God, the practical effects of theistic belief justify one's deliberately attempting to cultivate it (see Bishop 2007 and Soneson 1993). Perhaps the greatest benefit of such belief is that it provides a source of consolation for people who are grieving the loss of a loved one or facing their own imminent death. Another ostensible benefit, as Kant seemingly held, is that believing the universe to be governed by a just ruler can prevent the diminishment of one's moral resolve in the face of what might otherwise seem to be an "abyss of purposeless chaos" (CJ 5:452; see Paytas 2020).

Arguments in defense of pragmatic beliefs are not restricted to the theistic, however. In recent years, pragmatic arguments have been utilized in numerous contexts. One especially interesting application concerns the topic of friendship. Sarah Stroud (2006) and Simon Keller (2007) independently argue that the norms of friendship require a certain level of epistemic vice—we ought to trust and think more of our friends than the evidence warrants. In other words, the norms of friendship conflict with and override epistemic norms (cf. Kawall 2013). The wrestling match between truth and friendship is not new, as it can be traced at least as far back as Aristotle. On the one hand, Aristotle acknowledges that "without friends no one would choose to live, even though he had all other goods" (*Eth. Nic.* 8.1155a5–6); on the other hand, before examining the merits of Plato's account of Forms, he says that "for while both friends and the truth are dear, the right thing is to honor the truth first" (*Eth. Nic.* 1.6.1096a16–17).

Pragmatically grounded belief is not without danger, and this point pertains to both of the examples just mentioned. Theistic belief, especially in the context of organized religion, can lead to dogmatic resistance to scientific advancement and a hindering of moral and political progress insofar as such progress is not easily reconcilable with sacred religious texts and traditions. As for personal relationships, resolute faith in one's friends and family can prevent problems from being addressed and even sustain patterns of abuse. It is not easy to decide whether the potential benefits of the beliefs in question outweigh these risks.

There are, however, a few examples of pragmatically grounded beliefs for which we are fairly confident in their overall utility. There is evidence that one's chances of succeeding in a difficult endeavor are increased by slightly overestimating one's abilities and likelihood of success (Doris 2015; cf. Badhwar 2008). Anyone who aspires to make it as a professional athlete, musician, or writer faces long odds and will encounter numerous failures and setbacks along the way. The temptation to give up is always present, and succumbing to it brings one's chances of success down to zero. Having a belief in oneself that goes slightly beyond the evidence is extremely helpful for avoiding the temptation to quit, as well

as the anxiety that keeps most people from trying in the first place. Of course, if one is completely delusional about one's capacities, this can lead to years of effort put into an endeavor that was bound to fail. Hence, the challenge is to learn how to back oneself and maintain faith in ultimate success without succumbing to myopia or losing touch with reality. But if this can be managed, cultivation of a slightly exaggerated view of one's talents and the brightness of one's future seems prudent on the whole.

Another plausible example is one's choice of value theory. In our view, two of the most philosophically tempting theories of ultimate good are some suitably refined version of hedonism and a type of Stoic perfectionism. Few ideas are more in agreement with common intuition than that pleasure and enjoyment are good, and that pain and suffering are bad. However, our typical reactions to exhibitions of moral excellence support the view that virtue is what matters most. Unfortunately, debates about fundamental value are difficult to settle by argument—we eventually reach intuitional bedrock.

This is another point on which a pragmatic approach appears useful. As Epictetus emphasizes, if we accept the truth of hedonism, we are forced to acknowledge that our happiness is at the mercy of things beyond our control (*Disc*. 1.22). While we can certainly take steps to maximize our pleasure and minimize pain, we can never completely inoculate ourselves from the vicissitudes of circumstance. And when hedonists experience physical or emotional pain, they have to deal with the additional stress of viewing themselves as faring poorly. If, in contrast, we judge that virtue is the ultimate good, then no set of external circumstances can prevent us from viewing ourselves as faring well because it is always open to us to respond to circumstances in a virtuous manner. Hence, accepting Stoic perfectionism as one's value theory not only can facilitate the development of virtue, it can also immunize one from the psychological suffering that inevitably results from locating one's happiness in externals. Thus, even if hedonism is true, there is a case to be made that accepting the Stoic value theory is more conducive to hedonic ends (especially the minimization of suffering). These considerations seem to tell in favor of cultivating acceptance of Stoic value theory even if hedonism seems no less plausible on purely theoretical grounds. Our point here isn't that Stoicism provides a better philosophy of life than hedonism (though we believe it does). The point is, rather, that the pragmatic approach provides a useful way for adjudicating between competing philosophical views.

While we are generally confident about the net benefits of at least some pragmatically grounded beliefs, an important worry remains. As Wood (2002, 36) explains, "our chief reason for caring about Clifford's Principle is not that its violation sometimes results in individual acts that are horribly evil. It is rather that the habit of disregarding Clifford's Principle is profoundly corrupting, not only to individuals but even more to public discourse." Thus, the heart of the matter is whether it is possible

to deviate from conventional epistemic norms in a given context without developing general epistemic vice. This is a highly complicated question, and Plato doesn't address it explicitly. However, some of the norms and principles we have extracted from the dialogues (e.g. dichotomy of circumspection, intellectual courage, and skill-based risk assessment) go some way towards explaining how to mitigate the danger. At the very least, it seems clear that anyone who adopts a pragmatic approach needs to be vigilantly self-reflective and regularly monitor their epistemic habits.

3.3 The Human Condition

Part III argues that one vital way that humans differ from gods is that, unlike divine beings, humans—including noble philosophers like Socrates—can benefit from falsehood. Our material needs, along with our cognitive limitations and affective susceptibility, make us vulnerable, and falsehood in the forms of both deception and false belief can help us stay on the right path. Some might find such a view of human nature too pessimistic, especially if even the exemplar of rationality, the philosopher, faces internal conflicts and is susceptible to vice. Further, many might find the idea that even the best human beings need to rely on falsehoods rather uninspiring. We, however, see the acknowledgment of human frailty as a strength of Plato's Pragmatism.

This advantage becomes clearer when viewed in the context of recent debates about virtue ethics. While virtue-based approaches grounded in the ancient Greek tradition experienced a revival in the late 20th century, they have been the subject of a number of related criticisms. Some have argued that the view is too elitist and intellectualist insofar as it neglects the important role of emotions, automated reasoning, and less than perfectly rational agency (the "elitism challenge") (see Driver 2001; see also Doris 2015). Others have argued that the view is too confident in its depiction of virtues as robust character traits, and hence that it overlooks the various ways in which one's behavior is significantly influenced by external circumstances (the "situationist challenge") (see Harman 1999 and Doris 2002). One response to the situationist challenge is to argue that the virtues are integrated and unified via a thoroughly cultivated practical wisdom such that the virtuous agent is not at the mercy of situational factors to nearly the degree that skeptics have charged (see Kamtekar 2004 and 2010a; cf. Miller 2003 and R. Adams 2006). However, such a response plays into the elitism challenge since it accounts for virtues in such a way that few people (if any) actually possess them.

In principle, we see nothing wrong with normative ethics containing elements of elitism. We shouldn't assume that the true ethical theory will comprise ideals that are commonly instantiated. Ethics is not the study of how we live but rather how we *ought* to live, and it is rather obvious that these things come apart for most of us a fair amount of the time.

Hence, there is nothing wrong with a virtue-based approach that is highly idealized in the sense that the virtues are presented as aspirational rather than as something we are likely to fully realize. That being said, moral exemplars play an important role in both guidance and inspiration, and it is important that such exemplars, however excellent, still be recognizably human. As humans, the best we can do is *manage* the conflicts inherent in our embodied nature (R. Adams 2006; cf. Kamtekar 2010a). Hence, the most helpful role models are not those who are somehow free from such conflicts, but rather those who skillfully manage them.

We have argued that even the greatest of moral exemplars, Socrates, was susceptible to the irrational forces of desire and affect. What made him the "best of men" was his commitment to persisting in the battle against the enemy within, even going so far as to risk falsehood in an effort to live and die as a person of justice and courage. We are deeply sympathetic to this approach, and to the general view that nothing, not even truth itself, is as important as sound character. The task we are faced with is living up to this belief, not by exhibiting perfection, but by finally deciding to devote the rest of our lives to making progress, as Socrates did (Epictetus, *Hand.* 51). This is no small contest—the stakes are high and the opponent is unrelenting. But beautiful is the reward, and the hope great.

Notes

1 It is also possible to interpret the spirit of Clifford's "Ethics of Belief" as merely making the claim that epistemic norms require us always to believe on the basis of sufficient evidence (see Haack 2001 and Feldman 2006). On epistemic normativity and its relation to practical normativity, see Feldman (2000); Sosa (2010); and McCormick (2015, Chaps. 2–3).
2 However, it doesn't seem like one can have complete control over one's desires and actions either. With respect to agency and control, the difference between belief, desire, and action is often exaggerated (see McCormick 2015, 65–70).
3 Note that some have argued that Clifford should be read as a consequentialist (see Zamulinski 2002; 2004); for an assessment of these arguments and a defense of a Stoic deontology reading, see Aikin (2014, 41–47).

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